

JANUARY 1926 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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Continued
Stories

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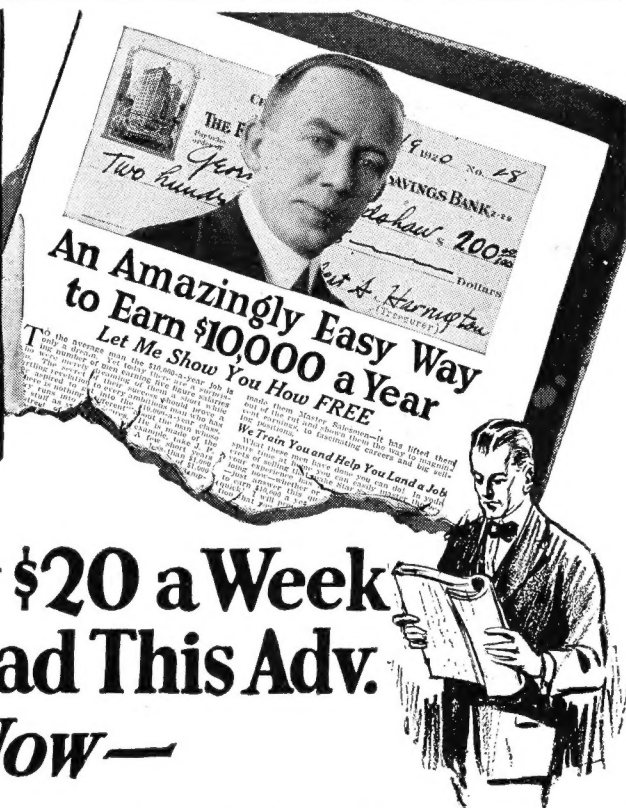
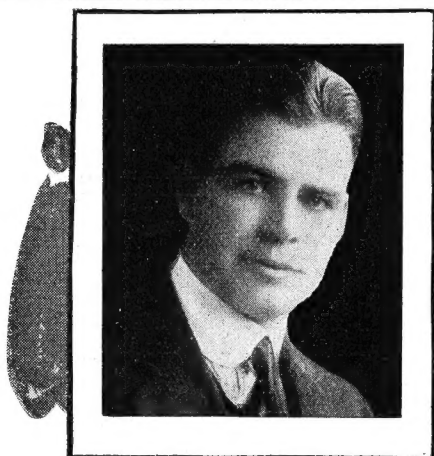
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Just keep an open mind until you have read all the remarkable facts in this interesting free book. It will show you how you can quickly and easily become a Master Salesman; how our FREE Employment Department will help you select and secure a good selling position when you are qualified and ready. And it will give you success stories of former routine workers who are now earning big incomes in the selling field. This book costs you nothing, and it may be the turning point in your life.



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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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The artist of the William Beebe expedition to Galapagos tells of a most exciting sea sport.

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A lively story of the box-fighting profession, by the man who wrote "Hortense Plays First," "Red Hot Mammals" and others.

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MAGAZINE

JANUARY
1926

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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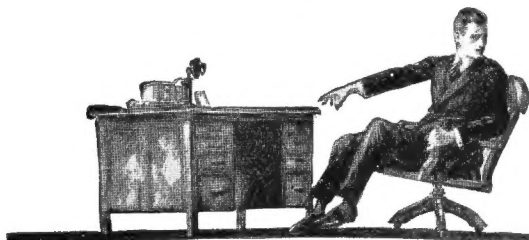
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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (January issue out December 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.

You may be slipping, too—

and you may
not know it



AMONG THE MEN who have enrolled for the Alexander Hamilton Institute are 32,000 presidents and business heads. Here is the story of one of them which is rather unusual.

He is 49 years old and had been head of his own business since 1910. It was at his special request that a representative of the Institute called at his office, and he plunged into the subject without a wasted word.

"I don't think you need to tell me anything about your Modern Business Course and Service," he said. "A number of my friends have taken it. They are enthusiastic. I trust their judgment. Let me have an enrolment blank."

The Institute man laid it before him. He picked up his pen and then paused for a moment, looking out of the window. Abruptly he swung around again and wrote his name.

"I have been slipping," he exclaimed. "For some months I have been conscious of it. Conditions have changed in business since I began; problems come up that need something more than merely rule-of-thumb experience. I've got to have someone helping me here, and the easiest way to get really reliable help, I guess, is to take on your experts as my private guides and advisors."

We say this story is unusual. Why? Because he was slipping and knew it. Thousands are slipping and don't. Every man in business is either lifting himself steadily, hand over hand, or he is

slipping. *There is no such thing as standing still.*

There are four signs of slipping; four separate groups of men who ought today to send for "Forging Ahead in Business," the book which gives all the facts about the Institute's training.

Are you in one of these four groups?

1. The man who sees opportunities for bigger undertakings, but who lacks the self-confidence to go ahead; who is afraid to reach out and assume responsibility; who knows that he lacks the knowledge on which to base large decisions. *The Institute can help that man.*

2. The man who has worked for many months without a salary increase. He has slipped; he may not know it, but he has. He needs some definite addition to his business knowledge, something to set him apart from his competitors, to make the men higher up take a new interest in him. *The Institute can help that man.*

3. The man who has stayed in the same position and sees no future. He may have had petty routine increases, but he has slipped. He is every day nearer to old age. He has been content with slow progress when the progress might have been rapid and sure. *The Institute can help that man.*

4. The man who knows only one department of business. He may be a good salesman, but if he knows nothing of accounting, banking, costs, factory and office management and corporation finance, he will be a salesman always. He may be a good accountant, and never reach beyond the accounting department. The man at the top must know *something about everything*. *The Institute can help that man.*

You will find the descriptive book published by the Institute, "Forging Ahead in Business," different from any piece of business literature you have ever seen. It is so practical, so directly related to your problem, so clear in its analysis of the reasons why some men rapidly go forward while other men slip back. We should like to put a copy of it into the hands of every thoughtful reader of this magazine. It will richly repay you for an evening of your time. Fill in your name below; your copy will come by mail, without the slightest obligation, *at once*.

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Another \$500

*For the sixth time it will be paid for the
“actual-fact” stories of Remarkable Experiences
you readers have had*

ALL that is required of you is to write the story of your most Remarkable Experience, in two thousand words or less, and send it to the Real Experience Editor of The Blue Book Magazine, 36 South State Street, Chicago, Illinois. Only stories of Real Experiences in the five fields of Adventure, Mystery, Business, Sports and Humor are desired, and for each such “actual-fact” story that the Editor retains for publication \$100 will be paid the writer.

These readers received \$500, November first

DON DICKERMAN, New York WALLACE A. HEMANTS, Florida
WILBUR COOPER, Illinois ALEXANDER SNYDER, New York
H. V. MENG, Washington

No literary talent is required to try

It's the Real Experience that is desired, told in your own way. The Editor and his assistants may be depended upon to do whatever is required to make your story smoothly readable. So don't be afraid to send in the “actual-fact” story of that unusual experience of yours because you believe you cannot write “like a real author.”

*On the second page following begins the first of
the five Real Experience Stories for January.*

Perhaps you have had a Real Experience even more interesting. Write the story of it and send it in with stamps or a stamped and addressed envelope inclosed for use in case your story is unavailable. And be sure to write your name and address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your story. For each such story of a Real and Remarkable Experience that the Editor does keep for publication in the March issue, its writer will receive The Blue Book Magazine's check for \$100 on January first. Remember the five fields specified—Real and Remarkable Experiences in Business, Adventure, Mystery, Sports and Humor.

\$500 for You



Amazing New Facts About Old Age

"Did you know that two-thirds of all men past a certain middle age suffer with a certain seldom mentioned disorder?"

"By the medical profession this is known as hypertrophy of the prostate gland. And scientists have now revealed that it is directly responsible for much of what many people mistake for actual old age."

NEW HYGIENE

But no longer should men approaching or past the prime of life put up with these painful and embarrassing conditions due to this cause. For a well known American scientist has discovered a new, safe home treatment for this gland trouble—a new kind of hygiene that goes right to the seat of this trouble, often bringing new pep and vigor to the entire body.

MIDDLE AGE AILMENTS

Here is usually quick relief for such distressing ailments as sciatica, aches in back, legs and feet, nervousness and irritability, when due to enlarged prostate.

**A Test Every Man Past 40 Should Make
FREE**



The coupon herewith will bring you FREE a vitally interesting booklet which will enable you to ask yourself certain questions which show you the true state of your physical condition. Fill out and mail the coupon immediately.

Twenty thousand men testify to the value of this treatment.

FEEL TEN YEARS YOUNGER IN SIX DAYS OR PAY NOTHING

So successful have been the results of this new hygiene in thousands of cases that the discoverer offers to send it to any man under the amazing guarantee that unless you feel 10 years younger in 6 days you pay nothing. There are no drugs to swallow—no exercises, diets or lessons.

ALL EXPLAINED IN FREE BOOK

If you are troubled with any of the disorders mentioned, if you have chronic constipation or this trouble, you should send for a vitally interesting free book, written by this scientist called, "Why Many Men Are Old At 40." It describes this splendid treatment and shows how you may often regain much of your youthful vigor and be free from certain disorders. No obligations. Simply fill out and mail the coupon below.

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In writing to advertisers it is of advantage to mention THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



The Elusive S.O.S.

By **Alexander Snyder**

A ship's radio man sometimes leads a dull life —then again he doesn't. Consider, for example, the humorous aspect of Mr. Snyder's Experience.

BY the time the summer of 1913 had rolled around, the dots and dashes had been flowing up and down my amateur aërial for two years and longer, so that I felt quite proficient in code work. I could even keep up with signals I picked up from commercial stations and ships at sea.

Ships at sea!

Just thinking about them made my pulses throb faster. I visualized far ports, strange lands, adventures, excitement. The tales related to me by ship operators strengthened my determination to join their ranks.

I procured a commercial license after passing the Government test at Brooklyn Navy Yard, and quickly found a berth

aboard a coastwise vessel. Aboard ship I damned the day I had left shore, and swore I'd quit when I got back; but once ashore, I'd quickly forget the long night watches, the eternal vibration of the engines, the poor food, the mountainous seas and my poor sea legs.

I kept on going back for more of the same.

I could sit around now in the outer office of the old Marconi Company in New York and sling yarns with the best of them. Only when some veteran of the key, often a youngster in years, spoke casually of having sounded the S. O. S. call, did I realize there was something lacking in my career.

I wanted to send out an S. O. S. myself.

What with stops ashore between trips, assignment to this vessel or that, a dozen or so, the years fled by without my ambition being realized.

True, I'd been through the Adriatic mine-fields and in the war zone. I'd seen the tail end of the Galveston hurricane of 1915 sweep by us. I'd drifted for a fortnight on a disabled vessel off the coast of South America; but our plight was never so dire as to require my calling for help.

At last the time arrived when I decided to swallow the anchor and live ashore.

"Just one more trip," I said at home. "It's my last chance to see the world. Once I'm settled ashore, I know I'll be high and dry for the rest of my life."

I SIGNED articles on the *West Avenal*, a Shipping Board freighter chartered by the Oriental Navigation Company. She was a new, spick-and-span vessel on her second voyage, and the skipper kept her like a yacht. My quarters were aft on the 'midships house, on the lifeboat deck, and were accessible only by a vertical iron ladder. There was a narrow battery-room, a commodious operating-room full of the newest and most efficient spark apparatus, and my sleeping quarters, which had accommodated three naval operators on her maiden voyage, the previous trip. Now, under private charter, the *West Avenal* carried but one wireless man, and I had the berth.

I anticipated a two months' trip. It turned out to be nearer five months before I got back. We had an uneventful passage to Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Rosario, and in the latter place loaded with corn for Marseilles. The second leg of the journey was also tame and uneventful, and I began to see my fond ambition fading fast.

We headed back for New York in December, and had Christmas and New Year's at sea. The weather changed suddenly. The North Atlantic can kick up a nasty rumpus in the winter time, and we were getting a sample. We labored against a gale midway between Bermuda and the Azores.

TOWARD dusk on the last day of the year, we passed a vessel hove to in that sea, and flying signals of distress; but when we approached, our aid was refused, and so we proceeded. About two o'clock on New Year's morning, however, I heard our

call letters, *KENG*, followed by the distress call. I hadn't heard that signal since the night I picked it up from a Japanese vessel off Cape Finisterre, two years before, when she successfully dodged a "tin fish" lying in wait for her. Now, however, I thrilled anew at the prospect of rescue work. The ship we had passed wanted us back.

I called the captain; but he was a mariner and not a romanticist; and so, after calculating our fuel resources, the weather, and all the odds, he had me search the air for some other vessel nearer the *Maratanza* and bound her way. Orders were orders, but I felt cheated.

Every night for a week thereafter I picked up from one to three distress calls from ships in trouble; but they were all too far away for us to go to them. Other vessels were assigned to the rescue work by *NAA*, the Naval station at Arlington, and we wallowed westward.

Early on the morning of January ninth, 1920, we anchored off Quarantine. As the haze lifted and I saw the snow-covered hills of Staten Island, I saw the end of my seafaring days at hand.

Up anchor, and on again to the dock!

I was smoking a last pipe with several of the officers in the first assistant's cabin, the first room on the engineers' alley. Something impelled me to go out on deck for a last look around the harbor. I rounded the 'midships house and stepped to the rail, and there I stood rooted for a second.

GIGANTIC, looming horribly close, a thin black wedge, seemingly as high as the heavens, bore down on us, about to strike where I stood. In a flash I sprang back for the alleyway, and craning my head out, looked back.

The sharp prow of the *Lancastrian* entered the side of our vessel like a knife going through cheese. Only not so silently! There was a rending, roaring crash, and a shock as of an earthquake, that threw me to the floor in the alley. I dodged farther to safety toward the engine-room. Suddenly I realized that would cut me off from my ladder to the deck above. I perceived it would be no place for a wireless man. My place was in the radio-room.

On this trip we had a pet monkey aboard; but I doubt if he ever climbed my ladder in better time than I did. I took

one good look around deck before entering the shack, and noted the snout of the other vessel withdrawing from the breach, while we heeled over to the injured side as the icy waters of the bay rushed in the gaping hole.

That much I saw before I sat down at the operating table and slung the headphones over my ears, with one phone pushed back so I might hear what went on around me. As I waited for orders, I slipped on a sweater and buttoned my uniform coat tightly, for it was zero weather and I had the door open. I wanted to be able to see the open sky.

THERE was a commotion on deck, and the men came swarming up my ladder with suitcases and duffelbags on their shoulders, headed for the lifeboats on either side and forward of my shack.

"Hey, Sparks!" they yelled at me in passing. "Keep an eye on this!" They tossed their luggage in on my floor until there was quite a heap. Then they disappeared around the corner of the shack, and I could hear sounds as of lifeboats being got ready to swing over the side. I felt like joining them, but I was chained to my chair until orders should come to vacate it.

I began to feel lonely, ill-treated and neglected. I looked aft through the open door. There was not a soul in sight, and the deck was still listed at a sickening angle. I shivered a bit, and not altogether from the cold.

Then the supercargo's head bobbed up the ladder, and I saw him at the door.

"Distress call?" I asked him. I supposed he had the authority.

"Yes," he said, "send it." And turning to the crew about the boats out of my sight, he called: "Hey, there! What about the sick man?"

Several men ran aft and brought the young fellow, a sufferer from mumps, up the ladder. They deposited him in my bunk, as being probably the highest place above water.

All this I saw out of the corner of my eye, for I had started the motor-generator. I waited until it developed top speed, using the current from the auxiliary source of power, the storage batteries in the next room. Then I pressed the key and looked at the aerial ammeter.

Eighteen amperes going out into space from a two-kilowatt spark set! Enough,

pretty nearly, to reach to Europe; but I wasn't economizing on current just then, though I knew we were in sight of the Woolworth Building, and almost under the nose of Brooklyn Navy Yard. I wanted to make a good, loud squawk, while I was at it, for it was positively my last chance.

I let out a swift tattoo of S. O. S.'s and signed my call letters. I must have knocked the ears off the Naval operator at that close range, for he was back at me in a flash, ascertaining the trouble, and volunteering assistance.

"Taking water, men standing by the boats," I told him. Then as the minutes passed and our plight seemed no worse, I modified my descriptions, and assured him that help was close at hand. There must have been a score of craft of all descriptions swarming about us by this time, figuratively licking their lips, with salvage in sight.

Finally a tug took us in tow, and finding our engines undamaged, we started for the beach off Staten Island in order to put solid ground under our bottom.

As we limped for the beach, some chap far out at sea called "*KENG*." I answered. "Steady, old man," he said. "We'll come for you. What's your position?"

I LAUGHED then until it hurt, as I thanked him and rejected his offer, informing him that we were right in New York Harbor.

It was a question whether we'd fill up and sink in the channel, or reach the beach first, but we made it safely.

Later, we had a merry breakfast together.

"Look at Sparks," said Tommy Tucker, the observant first assistant engineer. "Damme if he aint the happiest man aboard ship! All these years at sea, and no S. O. S.! And here on the last hour of his last trip, a tame eighteen thousand miles at that, he rings the bell! Dumb luck, I call it."

I am inclined to think his latter statement correct, because, had I walked aft instead of forward, just before the crash, I'd have been nicely garnished.

Did I say we carried Spanish *onions* back from the other side?

That's why my eyes fill with tears as I look back on the time the *Lancastrian* buried her nose in the side of the *West Avenal*, and then withdrew it in a hurry. Onions sure are powerful!



Capturing a Giant Devilfish

This Real Experience with a strange sport is by the artist of the famous William Beebe expedition to the Galápagos.

By

Don Dickerman

AFTER several months of cruising about in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, dredging with three miles of cable, and a great deal of scientific investigation among the desert islands of the Galápagos group, we had become a little blasé to the more or less intellectual thrills attending the capture of hundreds of new species of wonderful little deep-sea fish, and were wishing for something more exciting.

We had just dropped anchor off Narborough Island, when several giant devilfish were sighted, working along on the surface, and well inshore. It looked like a chance to blow off steam a bit, and three of us grabbed harpoons and started out immediately after breakfast in one of the little "kicker-boats," a fourteen-foot, low gunwale affair with an engine on the stern. Dr. Donald Cady of New Rochelle, the ship's surgeon, played skipper, assuming the "dirty work" in running the engine only because he was blessed with that sort of disposition. Dr. Cady had proven him-

self an excellent harpooner on a previous occasion. Dwight Franklin, artist, sculptor and fish *preparateur*, was the other member of our party.

We took two harpoon outfits. These consisted of the steel spear-point with rope and long handle attached. The rope runs up along the handle through several loops, and is tied firmly with a light piece of cord, holding the spearhead and the handle together, but arranged to break loose if a hit is scored and the head holds in the fish. The long handle, after coming loose, will work back along the rope until it can be cut away to leave the rope clear for action.

For greater facility, a long length of rope is used, with a large wooden cask on the end, so that if you are forced to let go to keep the boat from being swamped, the cask will keep the end of the rope afloat.

Dwight, by days of persevering and scouting for these monsters, had earned

the bow position, which I insisted on his taking, and I arranged my outfit in the middle of the boat. We were off!

AS we chugged away from the ship, two of the crew shouted after us that they had seen two pairs of flippers maneuvering on the other side of the *Arcturus*, so we "put-putted" around the stern and scared up a pair of fish that measured about six feet across. We chased them both for quite some time, but they were very timid at the sound of our motor, and sounded (dived straight down) the minute we would come within a couple of lengths of them. Finally we gave it up and started toward the island where the large ones had been seen.

There we found plenty! The popular idea seems to be that a devilfish and an octopus are the same. The devil-ray fish is no relation to the octopus, but quite flat and of triangular shape, his greatest thickness being in the region of the head and stomach. His two great wings spread out on the sides, and from the rear point of the triangle a long tail like the tail of a horseshoe crab is carried as a whiplike weapon. Over his head are two flippers which he uses to sweep the food into his mouth, which greatly resembles a subway entrance. It is the pair of flippers on the front of his head which gained for him the name of "devilfish."

The first one we spied measured probably ten feet between the tips of its huge flapping wings, which appear usually both at once and sticking up about a foot or two above the surface. Now and then we could also see his large flat head roll out of the water a little, maybe eight or ten inches above the surface at the highest point.

WE chased this fish in circles for about twenty minutes, but he was very fast and made rapid turns, keeping just barely out of range until he finally sounded and disappeared for good and all. Then we spied several more, which, being more timid, either dived at once, or after chasing about a bit.

The next half-hour we spent "put-putting" over the entire bay. Not being able to resist the excitement, all three of us stood up continuously, gazing in all directions, every now and then sitting down with a bang when a big wave would hit us.

Finally we came upon a great swirling

eddy with what looked like two fins of two different fish sticking out of the water. But they were the wing-tips of one great fish. As we came up on him, he gave a great swish and disappeared, coming to the surface again off to starboard with both huge wing-fins sticking up in the air three feet above the water. We raced after him and came up close enough to have our lances poised when Dwight let fly, but it was an illusion. He had aimed at a dark swirl, and the fins rose again almost immediately on the other side of the boat. We gave chase—and caught him just as he rose again! It was just off our starboard bow, and we both let him have it at almost the same instant, Dwight plunging first, hitting to the left center of his great head, while I threw mine from amidships just in time to catch him about twelve inches to the right of Dwight's.

THERE was a mighty splash, the handle of Dwight's harpoon hitting us both as the fish dived under our boat and struck with his wings, raising the boat out of the water with a terrific jolt to an angle of forty-five degrees, and then disappeared, taking our rope out like a rocket.

I grabbed my kodak just in time to snap the scene of action as he appeared about fifty yards off our bow with one barrel in the water and Dwight holding onto the other for dear life! I prayed it would be a good picture. Then after snapping one more, I tucked the kodak under the seat and jumped to the work at hand. He was leaping in the air and smacking the water with his wings so that it sounded like revolver-shots, with both harpoons waving about amid a lashing of blood and spray.

Then of a sudden he disappeared, and a moment later the rope in Dwight's hand was pointing directly for the bottom. By wedging the barrel against the gunwale, he held on until the boat was nearly under water before snapping the barrel overboard—whereupon both barrels went under and disappeared as though they had been small corks. This fish must have been fifteen feet from tip to tip, and his tail measured probably twelve feet. That was the last we saw of him, harpoons, barrels and all; and though we watched all day, he never came to the surface.

By now he has probably recovered and wears our tackle as a very handsome ornament; then again it is possible that he may have died and remained with his half-ton

of weight or so right smack on the bottom. He should have come up for air! He really should have! But he had ideas of his own, and we shall never hear from him again.

AS we bobbed around hopefully in our cockleshell, waiting for him to come up, and looking for bubbles in all directions till our eyes nearly fell out, up came the *Pawnee*, our twenty-eight-foot launch, with Mr. Tams, the second mate, Shorty our photographer with his camera, and a load of the ladies of the party, all screaming for action!

We suggested that if they would watch for our barrels, we would dash back to the *Ark*, get a harpoon and chase up another fish. This they agreed to do, and so we headed for the *Ark*, leaving them on guard. With the help of Mr. Tams, who returned with us, we got another outfit rigged up.

Dwight and I dragged out a coil of rope and a barrel, which we worked on in feverish haste, for the morning was waning and we would lose our chance. We could only stop long enough to fix up the one rig, so off we went, Dwight to take the first throw if we got a chance, and I to get in the second if he missed, which arrangement gave us an even break on the glory of a catch, but which, by sheer luck, threw all the best part of the fun my way.

As we left the *Ark*, we spied the *Pawnee* heading west along the shore, with all the ladies waving their arms in the air, so we headed full speed their way. On coming up with them, we nearly fell out of the boat with excitement. They were herding in front of them the most prodigious creature you could imagine—he seemed a bit annoyed by the launch, yet seemed to feel that nothing lived which was large enough to give him anything to worry about. Swimming contentedly along, he would come to the surface every fifteen feet or so, waving the tips of his wings four or five feet above the water, and showing a spread much greater than the width of our own boat. We howled with glee and drove straight for him.

HE came to the surface, our bow just grazing his right flipper. Dwight let fly. I snapped the old kodak. Talk about action! He did a couple of double somersaults that made the bay look like the Great Geyser, and charged off, pulling out

the rope and beating the water as the other one had done, only making a terrible business of it. Then to our dismay we discovered that he had dislodged the harpoon, and upon pulling it in, we found that he had bent the steel three ways! We thought he would disappear any minute, but he continued to lash the water and bleed rivers. We were not quite certain whether he was too bold to consider retreat, or whether his brain had been stunned, but he continued to swim in circles around us, beating the water with his huge wings the way a gorilla beats his chest.

We straightened out the harpoon, and I took my turn in the bow while the Doc brought the boat into play and charged close to his right wing. I shall never forget the thrill of excitement as I found myself with the old harpoon all set, and this giant flapping away there, directly in line for a throw! I can only remember that my legs trembled so with "buck fever" that I was afraid I would lose my balance—and this might be our last chance to get him before he sounded again! I concentrated everything on one spot and let him have it with everything I had in me!

The spear hit him fair in the head, and he turned a complete circle in one jump, side-swiping my left arm with the handle of the harpoon, and nearly upsetting our boat with a blow of his great flipper. And then the party was on! Yet he did not dive! On and on we rode, all over the bay, as I hung on for dear life and braced my feet in the bow.

ON and on we raced, while every second we expected to see him dive—then it would be the fish or the boat. But it did not last long. Evidently feeling that the trouble was all over, he slackened his pace and flapped easily along, with the three of us sailing merrily along in the trailing boat. I felt somehow that there was no great struggle coming, and that our only problem was to get him over to the *Ark* before he took it into his head to sound.

We had read in Dr. Gunther's "Study of Fishes" that "the capture of devilfishes of such large size is attended with danger, as they not rarely attack and capsize a boat." John Lawson wrote in 1714 that "The devilfish has been known to weigh a ship's anchor and run with it a league or two, and then bring her back against the tide to almost the same place." The superstition was so strong that fishermen used

to put down two anchors as a precaution against this. This was generally understood to be possible, in that one might, while drifting along, run afoul of a cable and grip it with his hornlike *corpteres*, which it uses for grasping purposes, or for fanning food toward its mouth. We also knew that the devilfish and the shark came from a common ancestor.

At any rate, we were ready for anything, and expected him at any moment to do as we had been warned against, and jump into the air, to land astride of our boat and crash us to pieces, but as a matter of fact, we were in for a comparatively easy time of it. I found that it was possible to guide him fairly accurately by beating him on one side or the other, every now and then, with a baseball bat, which I had taken along for a handy cudgel. As he started in the general direction of our mother-ship, Bill Merriam arrived on the scene in his kicker-boat with Ruth Rose and Lin Segal. On an inspiration of safety first, they tore madly off after another harpoon while the *Pawnee* continued to maneuver around, and Shorty Schoedsack reeled in his motion pictures.

WHEN Bill returned, we were still sailing merrily about the bay and offered to take on passengers at fifty cents a ride! Then we rigged the new harpoon, and Dwight took the bow. Stepping back amidships, I pulled in on our half-inch rope until the boat was fairly up on the back of the big fish,—wings stretching out on both sides of us,—while Dwight drove the second harpoon home with all his might. Then the real fireworks! Dwight caught a nasty blow on the arm from a wing-tip, and we both strained our utmost at the ropes as the acrobatics dragged us this way and that. To keep our ropes from becoming entangled, Dwight and I changed places again, while Bill handed Dwight his "six-gun," which he had brought out along with his shotgun and the extra harpoon.

I was pounding away with the ball-bat, when I saw the muzzle of a thirty-eight appear over my shoulder, while directly in front of me about ten yards the other side of the fish appeared Bill in his boat, flourishing his double-barreled shotgun. I could see the big fish cashing in his checks and sinking to the bottom with the band all out of tune, and I yelled for an armistice! "Wait till we get nearer to the *Ark*!" I screamed. Doc thought it was a good

hunch and started the motor backward to try and haul the old boy along. Mr. Devilfish of course put on his brakes and threw his motor into reverse, but our engine was good, and the fish was getting weaker, and we had not far to go.

UPON nearing the *Ark*, the two gunmen began flourishing their hardware again, and I certainly felt between the devil and the deep blue sea in every sense of the word. As we swung this way and that, I could see Dwight's thirty-eight ranging past my ear, and Bill apparently getting ready to give our boat a broadside. At the sound of the first shot, the big fish came to life, and at the end of about eight feet of rope. The fun was on!

Dwight placed most of his shots well, and Bill missed us twice, hitting the fish once! As I felt the thirty-eight almost in my ear, I yelled: "Hey! Take that out of my ear!" As I yelled this, the fish felt the sting of a load of buckshot and answered by raising his flipper and hitting me a hundred-pound smack on the ear that almost knocked me out of the boat! Actually I landed on the floor back by Dwight, and didn't hear anything in my left ear for a good five minutes. The girls in the *Pawnee* said that it was as though the fish had understood my scream, and they nearly fell out of their boat laughing.

He got under us somehow and raised our boat completely out of the water several times—once so that those in the other boats could see under both our bow and stern. He flapped and flipped, and we dodged and sparred! He would whang at us with that whip-tail, and I would beat back with my trusty ball-bat! He hit Dwight another good smack, and stunned my right crazy-bone; then he got me on the shoulder, leaving a proud and bleeding wound,—which I prayed then and there would leave a proud and livid scar! This was our dragon that comes only maybe, and if at all, once in a lifetime! He lashed and fought and continued to drag us about, but he was getting weaker.

Following another salvo from our battle-ships, there was a terrific tug that nearly upset me out of the boat. The big boy had finally decided to beat a retreat! Both ropes had become snarled, and I clung to the knot, bracing my feet and putting every ounce of strength I had into it. If I had not let him have a few fathoms, he

Capturing a Giant Devilfish

certainly would have swamped the boat, for we had already taken water in over the gunwale several times. I paid it out little by little, and began to fear we were going to lose him, when I felt the strain relax—just a little—but enough so that by getting hold of a kink in the line and throwing everything against him, we came to a deadlock. Right there was where I had the fight of my life. Screaming to Doc to get us over under the boom which Mr. Tams, the second mate, was swinging out from the *Ark*, I braced every muscle and stood straight in from the gunwale—just balancing the boat, and just barely holding the fish. It seemed that if he were to pull another four pounds I was gone, but there was a little too much lead in the fish, and he was about through. Dwight was madly working away at the lines, knotting them up to the tackle which had been dropped overboard to us from the big boom.

"Yo-ho!" from Tams, and as I felt the slack taken up and the strain taken out of my hands, I gratefully resigned the job to the *Arcturus* and the boys on deck. And we were almost hoisted on board too! Our painter had become entangled in the snarled ropes, and we were rising from the water by the bow! Dwight jumped with his sheath knife, cut the painter, and we backed away to watch the proceedings.

What a fish! It looked as if the bottom of the ocean were being brought up. The first tackle slipped, but the harpoons held. The second attempt was successful, and up he went. As the boom swung in and he cleared the gunwale, and we realized that he was on the deck of the *Ark*, it was then that we drew our first full breath. The strain was broken, and fifty throats opened up for a loud and raucous cheer.

From wing-tip to wing-tip he measured eighteen feet, and weighing him piece by piece, he summed up twenty-four hundred pounds, just better than a ton! The eyeballs weighed ten pounds apiece; and Serge, our tough Cossack, nearly broke his back trying to lift the stomach out.

Our director, Dr. Beebe, who had been diving along the shore, had missed the fun. When he came aboard and saw the monster laid out on deck, he was quite distressed. "What a shame!" he said. "It's such a large one we can't preserve it!"

But if it had been a smaller fish, it would not have been as exciting, and if it had been larger, I am afraid he would have surely beaten us.

A Rule of Trade

By **Wilbur
Cooper**

"WHEN you can't sell,
it's time to buy" is the
motto stressed in this
odd Business Experience.

I LEARNED the rudiments of business from Ebenezer Tuttle. The folks called him Eb when I was a boy observing his merchandising technique. He was rated in those days as the richest, keenest, most industrious collector of coin of the realm in Sandy Hill. The present status of the Tuttle family I can't vouch for. There have been many changes. Sandy Hill, for example, has become Hudson Falls. Automobiles have replaced the coaches and pairs which constituted the badges of aristocracy for the Tuttles, and the Wings and Keenans and Finches and Pecks who were our first families in those days.

But the fundamental business rule which old Eb Tuttle laid down for me still is good. I tried it not so long ago, and it was in good working order. I don't mean to infer that I have Eb's technique of vamping the elusive dollar into my pile. I lack certain fundamental complexes which Eb possessed. For example, take his notions of art: He didn't think Whistler, or even Raphael, had any remarkable powers of interpretation. He had a much higher regard for the workmanship of those engravers who do the portraits of various Presidents for the United States Treasury, and he wouldn't give a single Washington for all the paint the old mas-

A Rule of Trade



the nonce. The problem confronting you is: how shall you get a profit on your wheat? There are, of course, others in the same position. They want to sell, and can't any more than you can. You have, you see, competition in the selling-field. To be successful, you must enter a field in which the competition is almost negligible. Now then, where is that? The buying-field, of course! If you can't sell, you can buy, and pretty much at your own price. All you will find it necessary to do is to buy all the wheat offered and hold it. When you have all there is, and the world gets hungry, you can name your own price. Any person of normal intelligence who carries out a wheat transaction in the manner described should be independently wealthy at the conclusion of the deal.

ters ever brushed on canvas. Then too, he had his own ideas of kindness. It always pained him to see a widow worrying over an overdue mortgage on the old homestead. He had a fine appreciation of the pain and uncertainty a woman suffered in such a pass. So he made it a point, whenever he held the mortgage, to end the suspense with dispatch. He'd foreclose the day after default. He had other endearing tricks too, but somehow I never could acquire facility in the use of them. But his one great rule—that was worth while. It ran thus:

"When you can't sell, it's time to buy."

Any professor of commerce and economics in any university can write five volumes amplifying that rule, explaining why it is a good rule, elucidating its relation to the law of supply and demand, and all that sort of thing.

Let me prove its potency by showing you how it works. You have, let us suppose, a thousand bushels of wheat. You find yourself unable to sell it, at least at a price that will reimburse you for the cost of growing it. You may not know it, but you are up against the immutable law of supply and demand. You have the supply, and Mr. Demand is taking a vacation for

There will, of course, be certain unreasonable persons who will want to ask about such minor details as where the money to buy is coming from. Some folks never want to solve any of their own problems. To these, I can merely say that the success of the plan is predicated on your having the money. Thrifty persons always have money. The old saws say so: "Save and have," "A penny saved is a penny earned," "Waste not, want not," and so forth.

There are, of course, variations of conditions under which the rule may be used. My first illustration was made because it is the most simple. All that is necessary is to know the rule and have the money.

BUT the operation is by no means confined to wheat. You can use it in corn, or in apples—any number of commodities. I used it to promote a little deal in street-sign projectors. A street-sign projector is a most interesting appliance. You set it up in a corner of your show-window, and it flashes a sign on the sidewalk. The public at first supposes the letters are chalked or painted on the surface. There always is, for some strange reason, an impulse to blot out such signs with the feet. Great interest is aroused,

and the populace, after vain attempts to erase the letters of projected light, read about your bargain. It is the very best form of advertising—so the chap who sold me the agency and seven of the projectors as an initial stock, told me. He wanted me to take a dozen so as to be ready for the rush that would follow the first demonstration, but I had only seven hundred dollars. All that was necessary, he said, was to demonstrate and collect two hundred dollars for each projector.

What could be simpler? I paid him the seven hundred dollars and started out with my projectors. The demonstration was as easy as I had been assured it would be. But there was a little difficulty when it came to collecting the two hundred dollars. One merchant offered me twenty-five. Others thought fifteen was enough. The best offer was fifty,—the most unsatisfactory, one to pay my expenses to a hospital, the gent making the offer opining that anybody who thought a sidewalk advertising apparatus was worth two hundred dollars should have his head examined.

Then I thought of Eb Tuttle's celebrated rule:

"When you can't sell, it's time to buy."

So I said to my friend the merchant:

"What'll you take for the advertising value of your sidewalk?"

"Ten dollars, cash," he replied. "And you can have it for a year for that."

I GAVE him a dollar to bind the bargain, and hastened to pawn my watch to raise the other nine. Soon after I obtained it, I was possessed of an iron-clad contract giving me space in his window for my projector and space on his sidewalk to do with as I pleased. It was a good show-window. My friend was the leading clothier, although his nearest rival accused him of selling shoddy. I had called on that rival. He had offered me fifty dollars and had named that as his limit for one of my doo-dads. But I suspected that after obeying Eb Tuttle's rule I might be able to interest him. Before calling on him, however, I dropped in on a hardware man and a druggist who were possessed of bitter rivals, and who had a low opinion of the advertising value of sidewalks. They, as did the clothier, jumped at the offer of ten dollars for a year's right to their sidewalks, with window space for the "magic lantern," and although I had to sell one of my two-hundred-dollar machines for

twenty-five to raise the money, I purchased both.

Then I called on the rival merchants. When they heard my proposition, they sat up and wanted to sign perpetual contracts. I preferred, however, to do business on a day-to-day basis.

ONE of the things you will find a bit unpleasant in business is the attitude of some of those persons with whom you have to deal. I have been able to understand, since that business transaction, why European aristocrats avoid trade as unpleasant. It is, at times, very. You would naturally think that after I paid those merchants the price they asked for the privileges they granted, they would be satisfied to let me conduct my business without interference. But they were not—they seemed disgruntled that I was making a success of my little venture. One, indeed, was so put out that he threatened me with physical violence, all because inadvertently I had sold the advertising space in front of his store to a competitor. He had deemed it of little value, and really, I could see no harm in permitting another man in the same business to utilize it if he felt it was worth paying money for.

And it happened, by a chain of those strange coincidences that come up in business, that the only persons who would pay for the use of one of these three sidewalks I had acquired, were men in the same lines, and somewhat bitter competitors. But could I be blamed? I merely sold my wares in the best market.

Yet it was not until the police and judges and lawyers assured them that my contracts were iron-clad that these men who had taken my money ceased to threaten and abuse me, tried to return the payments I had made and cancel the contracts. Of course I couldn't consent to do that.

And it was, indeed, a lucrative business, paying me nightly the amount I had paid for it all year. But for some reason I was unable to purchase any more sidewalks. So again I had recourse to another rule of Eb Tuttle's:

"When you can't buy, it's time to sell."

I sold the sidewalks back to their owners and threw in the projectors for good measure. I charged them only one thousand dollars each, although the business promised to pay much more. But I felt that one should always obey the rules.



The Clue ^{of} the Cloth

By
**Wallace A.
Hemants**

This is a true detective experience of a real detective, and the Mystery he cleverly solves is extremely interesting.

IN these days of the scientific detective with his microscopes and fingerprints and cameras and his laboratory equipped with "lie-detectors" and similar modern inventions, it is refreshing at times to turn back the pages of detective history and recall some of the exploits of the old-time "dick," who, equipped only with good eyes, common sense and a gun, went forth alone and got his man.

Such a detective was Joe Perry. It has been thirty years since Perry solved the famous Waldon murder mystery, but I can see him yet just as he looked that morning he dropped into the little country town of Waldon, Iowa, where I lived. His black slouch hat was perched on one side of his head carelessly; his black mustache was shiny with wax; and his clothes were care-

fully tailored and spotless. Everyone mistook him at first for a drummer.

Joe Perry had been sent to Waldon by a Chicago detective agency to investigate one of the most sensational murders ever committed in that part of the State. Using fictitious names,—because some of the principals are still living,—here are the facts as they appeared to us:

The principal drug-store in Waldon was owned by Frank Worley, a man in his late thirties, whom everyone liked. Worley's wife, Estelle, was a beautiful woman in her dark-eyed, ravishing way; and it was the gossip of the little town that Worley's clerk, Jim Denton, was madly infatuated with her, and that he had sworn he would have her even if he had to shoot her husband to get her. I remember that they

were together a great deal on afternoons when Worley was down at the river fishing or hunting. I remember also that it was said that Worley and Denton frequently quarreled violently, and that on several occasions Worley had threatened to fire Denton. Denton openly boasted that Worley did not dare to discharge him, as he, Denton, had "too much on Worley." What he had on Worley, if anything, we never learned.

Then, one night, shortly after midnight, the town was aroused by the ringing of the fire-bell. As was the custom in small towns in those days, everybody turned out to see where the fire was and to help put it out. Soon the cry went up: "It's Frank Worley's drug-store! It's Frank Worley's drug-store!"

WE did our best, but the fire had too much of a start. The whole interior of the big frame building was a roaring mass of flames when we reached it. Not a thing was saved.

That was bad enough; but a more serious situation presently developed. Neither Worley nor Denton could be found.

When I first saw Estelle Worley that night, she was already half-hysterical. She stated that Frank had told her he had to work at the store until very late, and for her not to wait up for him. At the sound of the fire-bell, she awoke and discovered that he had not come home. She had not seen, nor heard, anything of him since.

Jim Denton's mother told practically the same story—that Jim had informed her that he had to work late at the drug-store. She had left a light for him and had gone to bed. Aroused by the fire-bell, she discovered that he had not been home. She had not seen him, nor found anyone who had seen him, since the fire-alarm.

Finally it became whispered about that a young couple out walking passed the drug-store about eleven o'clock and saw that although the curtains were down, the lights were still on. They declared that they heard Frank Worley and Jim Denton quarreling angrily.

The fire burned itself out, and we went to work with our poor equipment to drench the embers and make a search for bodies. It was three o'clock that afternoon before the electrifying shout went up: "Here he is! Here he is!"

Everybody rushed to the spot, getting in each other's way, of course. Finally the

sheriff—he had driven over from the county seat—and our local doctor took charge. Presently a body was brought into view. At sight of it, the women fled and the men uttered low cries of horror. It was burned to an unrecognizable mass.

"Who is it—Worley or Denton?" the question ran around. But no one could answer it and so we continued our search. Soon we found a bunch of keys and Estelle Worley immediately identified them as her husband's keys. The key-plate, after some scraping, showed that it had been stamped with Worley's name. Then a bit of molten gold was found which proved to be a watch-charm that Worley had carried for years. That gave the doctor an idea, and he presently located another small mass of gold which, while badly melted, still showed plainly that it had been a signet ring belonging to Frank Worley.

By that time it became necessary to take Mrs. Worley away. I remember we were just turning to go when the doctor spoke up bluntly: "Look at the hole in his skull! That was made with an ax! Sheriff, you don't need to waste time looking for Jim Denton around here!"

There was considerable feeling in the town that night, and much talk of lynching Jim Denton if he was caught. Both Estelle Worley and Mrs. Denton remained at home under the doctor's care.

Now, that was the situation Detective Joe Perry faced that morning he dropped off the train at Waldon.

First of all, he listened to the statements made by the sheriff and the doctor. He took a great deal of interest in the keys and bits of jewelry we had found, and asked many questions of us all.

The body had been laid out in a room back of the doctor's office. I remember that Perry stayed in there so long, smoking and gazing dreamily at the ceiling, and pulling at his carefully waxed mustache, that we finally became tired and went on out, leaving him alone. That—I learned months later—was precisely what he wanted us to do.

AT eleven o'clock that night Joe Perry left. I was with the men who accompanied him to the station.

"Is it true," I asked, "that you are taking with you a picture of Jim Denton and a sample of his handwriting?"

"Mebbe I am, and then ag'in, mebbe I aint" returned Joe Perry, grinning.

"Do you really think there is much chance of getting Denton?" the sheriff asked.

I remember Perry considered this carefully, before he answered: "Don't quote me," he said quietly, "but I don't mind telling you, confidential-like, that I don't think we'll ever catch that Denton fellow. If we do, though, he'll sure hang, with all that evidence you got ag'in' him."

BUT now notice what happened! Three months after that night we saw Joe Perry off on the train at that little town in Iowa, he popped up in a dance-hall in Nome, Alaska. Walking up to a man standing by the bar, he showed his detective badge and said quietly: "Hello, Worley! You're pinched! Never mind, now; I got you covered!"

Perry brought Frank Worley back to Waldon, Iowa, and saw him convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. During the trial it came out that Worley's life was heavily insured, and that Mrs. Worley was the beneficiary, but everyone was convinced that Mrs. Worley had no part in this. The insurance company, not satisfied, had sent Perry to investigate.

I remember the talk I had with Perry the day Frank Worley was sentenced.

"Joe," I said,—we were quite friendly by that time,—"that night you left, why didn't you tell me you were taking away a picture of Frank Worley and a specimen of his handwriting?"

"You didn't ask me," grinned Joe. "You were thinking too much of Denton. And you didn't ask me why I felt so sure we'd never catch Denton. Neither did you ask me to show you that piece of Jim Denton's shirt."

"Shirt? What do you mean?"

Joe Perry got out a fat leather wallet. "I never flashed this at the trial because it wasn't necessary," he said. He held up a piece of checked cloth the size and shape of a half-dollar. "You see, I knew something of what happens when a man is burned, so when you fellows left me alone, I got busy. I found this in the left armpit of that body you found in the ruins of Worley's store. Without showing it to anybody, I had very little trouble in proving to myself that it was a piece of Jim Denton's shirt. That convinced me that it was Denton who had been killed, and that Worley had planted all that other stuff you found."

SO, with that trifling bit of cloth, Joe Perry started out. His method was all common sense and savored not a bit of the sensational methods of the modern detective.

"The first thing I did," Perry told me, "was to set down and smoke and try to figure out what I would do if I was Worley. Go to the Klondike, of course! Everybody was either joining the gold-rush or wishing they could. Then I began figuring on trains. I certainly wouldn't take a train right here in Waldon. Wouldn't it be a clever scheme to hoof it across the country eighteen miles to Hinchville and grab the westbound passenger that goes through there about daylight? It would! Well, I found by questioning trainmen that was exactly what Worley had done. But he was no fool. He traveled four thousand miles, and never once bought a railroad ticket. He hopped trains the last minute and paid cash fares. And he never went far in the same direction at a time. His trail to Seattle was as crooked as a dog's hind leg that's been tied in a bow-knot."

But from town to town Perry followed him, his only clues being hotel registers where Worley signed a different name every time, and never his own, and the faulty memories of trainmen. Finally the trail led to a steamship office in Seattle, where Perry learned that for the first time Worley had been compelled to buy a ticket. That ticket, taken out in an assumed name, was for a port in Alaska. A few weeks later, Perry snapped the handcuffs on Worley's wrists.

WORLEY'S crime, as every newspaper reader knows, has been duplicated many times in the past thirty years; but I'd like to see one of our "up-to-the-minute" dicks duplicate what Joe Perry did. Today, elaborately equipped bureaus of identification would flash Frank Worley's description broadcast. They would even send his fingerprints and photograph by wire! Within an hour thousands of trained detectives all over the United States would be watching out for him. And even then he might get away!

Joe Perry, knowing nothing of the science of criminal detection, took a bit of cloth, a picture, a scrap of handwriting, went out alone with his old-fashioned gun and handcuffs, trailed his man thousands of miles—and got him!

Down to Earth

By

H. V. Meng

The Real Adventure Experience that is here recounted by this airplane pilot is one of the most extraordinary we have ever printed.



NO one can accuse me of being a spiritualist. Even as a child I scouted the idea of ghosts and haunted houses; however, I have a faint memory of evading the promise to stay overnight in a so-called haunted house in the little town where I was raised, and I remember how the other kids jeered me for being scared of the "ha'nt," a thing which I indignantly refused to believe in. But I had an experience at the end of the late World War which has kept me pondering many an hour.

At the time this happened I was stationed at Rockwell Field, California.

Rockwell Field is on a small island in San Diego Harbor, "the Harbor of the Sun." A wonderful aviation field, and also a strategic position for Uncle Sam's eyes, just at the mouth of San Diego Harbor and across from Fort Rosencranz, on top of Point Loma, which guards that end of these United States.

Shortly after my assignment, I was out on the line one morning, when a certain Captain Stewart approached me and asked if there was a ship that could take him to Camp Kearney. I was just going up, so I told him to hop in and I'd take him up

there. As we rose over Coronado Beach, I kept watching a small bungalow in the center of the island where I had recently installed my bride. We crossed the city away to the northeast.

In a few moments we sighted the camp and circled over the parade ground at an altitude of 5,000 feet. I "pulled a falling leaf," coming out of it at five hundred feet, headed for the field and landed. The Captain asked me what sort of stunt I used to lose altitude. I explained to him, thinking at the time it was queer that a captain with wings didn't understand a "falling leaf."

After he finished his business at headquarters, Captain Stewart came out and climbed in the back seat. He called: "I'll fly her back, Lieutenant." This was O. K. with me. He was wearing wings, and although he didn't seem to know a great deal about flying, surely he must know how to do straight flying. Of course I was still in the front seat, and he did not offer to change. The ship was a dual control, but it is customary in the army for the pilot to fly from the front seat. In case of a smash-up, the man in front gets the worst of it, and if the one in front is

doing the flying, naturally he is going to fly more carefully.

Well, he took off all right, but he forgot the ship was equipped with apparatus for sending wireless telephony, which made it tail-heavy. As he rose, he climbed too much. I commenced to think that there were some things about flying that this bird did not know, and I motioned twice for him to put the nose of the ship down. He had reached about three hundred feet and started banking to the left to make a left turn, when about halfway around the turn, the nose of the ship turned slowly downward. As the field was long and directly underneath us, I thought he had forgotten something and was going back to land. Just then it whipped, and the tail flew up. I knew we were in for it.

I looked below and saw the top of a building rapidly approaching. I grabbed the stick, but could not budge it. He was in a tail-spin about a hundred and fifty feet above a building, and in his terror had frozen to the controls. "Let go!" I shouted, and I yelled so loud the soldiers on the ground heard me, and I was sure minus my voice for a few days. When I next looked at that building, I could see the heads of the nails in the roof. I just folded my arms across my face and ducked under the cowl. Then came the funny works.

We hit that building going miles an hour, with gun full on. I think they heard the crash in San Diego. Then I began to have the queerest feeling. I was soaring out of the building like a bird. I rose up through the hole made by the ship. Looking down, I saw soldiers running from every direction; at the front of the building a group was ramming the door. The tail-skid, wings and part of the fuselage lay on the roof, while the engine and other half of the fuselage were on the inside. The hole in the roof was immense, so I floated around to look inside. Then I got the shock of my life.

The Captain was staggering to his feet and there was *my own body* lying on the floor. Part of the fuselage was hanging on the heavy beams of the roof, and the engine had burrowed through the floor. Gasoline dripped down my face, and I noticed that my goggles were still on. I wondered if my face and eyes were cut. Then I realized that something had happened to me. *The real me* was not that poor limp body lying down there. I

couldn't get a look at the me that was up here in the air, so I gave it up and turned to events below. All this happened in such a short time that the door was not yet battered down. Of a sudden it struck me that I was dead, and this was my spirit which had left my body. The first thing that flashed across my mind was how sorry my wife of two months would be.

I ROSE higher in the air, no longer interested in the affairs around the gruesome building, but as I did so, the voice of my bride came up to me, calling—calling. I stopped my flight to listen. She called again, and I thought I could hear tears in her voice. I turned and began to descend, but a feeling of well being came over me. How pleasant it was to float up here! The air was so refreshingly cool, and the beams of the sun bright and sparkly. Down below, everything was confusion, and up here nothing seemed to matter. I recalled the old Lama in Kipling's "Kim." He had a similar experience when he fell in the river and found his "Wheel of Life."

That must be it: I was dead, and something seemed to be urging me upward. One more look at the body that had once been mine, and I would go up, I thought. I floated down to the building again. The soldiers were just battering the doors through. I noted that over the doorway was a sign "Y. M. C. A.," in large letters. I glided up to the roof again and saw that my body was still there. Captain Stewart was sitting on the edge of the platform dazedly rubbing his head. The fuselage was about to fall on my body and mash it if the gasoline didn't blow everything up. Poor Grace, I mused, she won't even be able to recognize my body. And her voice came to me again; this time there was fear in it, and something I couldn't define. It was as though she was in great need of help, and I was the only one who could help her.

They were entering the building now, and in the semigloom had discovered the Captain. I noted his face was a mass of cuts, and blood was streaming over his head. The voice of my wife came again. There was terror in it now, and an accusing note. She did not seem to be crying over my death, but her voice sounded like a soul in hell, and she seemed to be calling to me to do something which I alone could do. I felt sorry for her, and thought

maybe I had better go down to my body before the boys got it. But it had been so peaceful up here in the air, I realized that all earthly troubles would be over if I heeded that something which was urging me upward. Never again would I have to shave, or wear heavy army boots or blouses that nearly cut my throat, and all the other little irksome details that go to make up life. But the voice of my wife had a tremendous tug at my heart, or whatever organ of feeling I now had in this new state. I was very much in love, and the thought of her being in trouble and needing my help worried me considerably. If I was to return, I must do it quickly. The ambulance was just turning the corner at headquarters, and the soldiers were reëntering the building after having deposited the Captain outside. Looking through the roof, I could see the fuselage trembling above my body, and somehow I did not want my body mangled so my wife could not recognize it. So with her voice pleading to me, I dived into the building.

THE next thing I realized, I was lying in the dirt and dust of a floor. I could feel something trickling down my face which I thought was blood, but as my senses returned, I realized from the odor it was gasoline. I was afraid I would be afire in a moment. I could dimly make out a chair a few feet from me, and made an attempt to pull myself toward it. Somehow my legs could not move, but dragged painfully along behind. Then forms appeared in the gloom and lifted my tortured body and bore it out to the ambulance. Just then a terrible crash occurred behind us, and I later learned that the fuselage crashed to the floor as the soldiers carried me out the door.

Later I found that I had two broken legs and a fractured spine. I spent the next year in the hospital! But the part that got me was, every detail that I noted when I seemed to be floating around in

the air while my body was inside the building, was correct. The ship was broken just as I saw it from up there. The wings, tail-skid and part of the fuselage were on the roof, and the engine and the other part of the fuselage was inside. I was thrown from the ship when the fuselage broke in two, and when the soldiers found me, I was trying to drag myself to a nearby chair. It was a Y. M. C. A. building which had been closed and barred for some time, which we hit, and the soldiers had quite a time breaking the door down. They found the Captain in a daze on the platform, and his face was cut just as I had noted while up in the air.

ON questioning my wife, she disclaimed any knowledge of the accident until about two hours after it had happened. She wouldn't even admit having a queer feeling at the time of the accident. So I lay it to her subconscious mind calling my spirit which had left my body, but by a strong force of will-power on my part was forced to return. Or something of that sort! I don't know—for I never was a student of anything pertaining to spiritualism or psychology or the like. But in a few weeks my wife informed me we could expect a visit from the stork about the next summer. So if there was anything to that idea of her needing me, I guess that was the reason.

But the thing that made me mad and would have put me down for a murderer, if I hadn't been in plaster casts, was when Captain Stewart visited me at the hospital. The only effect he showed was a black eye. His cuts had not been deep, but appeared so at first, as they bled profusely. "Well, Lieutenant," was his greeting, "you were lucky to have me with you in that accident. I was in the racing game before the war," he continued, "and in many an accident, and it was the saying around the tracks that in any accident Stewart was in, no one was ever killed."

Wouldn't that get your goat?

PERHAPS now that you have read these five stories of Real Experience, you will realize that you too can contribute a true story of Adventure, Mystery, Humor, Sport or Business that will be well worth reading. If you can do this, write the story in your own way and send it to the Real Experience Editor of The Blue Book Magazine, 36 South State Street, Chicago, with stamps inclosed for its return if the Editor doesn't keep it for publication. If he does keep it for publication, the Magazine's check for one hundred dollars will be sent you. Be sure to write your name and correct address in the upper left-hand corner of the first page of your account.



The Loner

One of the most attractive stories of the West we have ever published—by the noted author of "The Unknown Mr. Kent," "The Flame" and "Drowned Gold."

By ROY NORTON

THE times of John Barton are gone, although there still live in the Far West men with gray beards, halting steps and numbered days who can, from the somewhat dusty archives of memory, recall him. The type of men like John Barton seems also to have gone—unless, as ghosts, they haunt the trails that have grown dim or become obliterated through lack of use or utility. The very land that knew John Barton has changed from wind-swept valleys of grass, or deserts that needed but irrigation, to well-ordered farms tilled by a generation to whom a buffalo or a wild steer is as foreign as an animal in a menagerie. Of John Barton nothing but the legend remains. Not even those ancients with rheumy eyes from which the frontier keenness and alertness have long faded can tell whence he came, or what his antecedents; nor are these pertinent, for it is of what he did that they remember, and perhaps garrulously boast as if to prove to their grandchildren that their own brilliant days of lusty manhood were more virile, more stirring, more testing than these humdrum times of lethargic peace.

It was in those "days now dead beyond recall"—thank God!—that into the then straggling street of Big Cañon wandered John Barton, tall, bent, yet active despite gray hair and white beard. Hands and face were gnarled, but his eyes were keen, gray and of a disarming benevolence. He spoke but little, and always in a gentle voice, a voice that seemed to protest against anything harsh or sudden. He appeared content with the sole friendship of a dog. And the dog seemed equally content with the sole friendship of John Barton; for it was ever at his heels, or by his side when he sat down, and the gnarled hand invariably came to rest on the dog's head. Men observed the dog as much as its master; for it was a huge mongrel whose ancestry at some time had included a timber wolf. It resented its master's intercourse with other men, eying the entire world askance as if anticipating malevolence. It had unquestionably been trained to guard John Barton's back; for when ever the man stopped in the street, the dog would instantly fall behind him, face the other way and keep vigilant watch. Once

a man, imbued with friendliness, started to lay a hand on John Barton's shoulder—and there came through the air like a bolt of gray wrath, with huge fangs exposed and great head outthrust, that dog. Nothing save the quick thrust of Barton's arm saved the ripping of a man's throat, and provoked the only explanation he, John Barton, was ever known to give of his former life.

"Don't blame him, sir. —Down, Sioux! Get behind me! —He thought maybe you was goin' to go for me. You see, me and him's been in a country where we had to sort of look out for each other when the corners were tight, and—he meant nothin' by it—saved my life more'n once, and—"

His low, gentle voice died away into mumbled, inaudible, broken sentences, an habitual closure; but after that, the reputation of the dog called Sioux was established, and men moved with caution when in its vicinity. Yet dog and man had what was the extreme virtue of their days and environment, in that each strictly, unendingly, resolutely, "minded his own business."

THE "business" of John Barton, it became known, was cattle. A cow-man might have denied this and called him, contemptuously, "a nester;" but he was the forerunner of those who knew how to farm as well as "run stock," and most of all, knew how to depend upon themselves entirely and adequately. Big Cañon, being a divisional headquarters, caught the gossip of railway crews that the company had been induced to build a small cattle-pen and chute at Manipa; and men smiled and wondered, because Manipa, the first station west of Big Cañon, and eighty miles distant, had theretofore consisted of but three structures, a tiny red station, a huge, round water-tank, and a patchwork hovel for the section gang. Yet in due time three carloads of young stock consigned to John Barton were by him and Sioux driven away.

It was Tom Horn, the somewhat inquisitive storekeeper from whom John Barton bought his supplies, who first gleaned information of the latter's situation, hopes and emprise, with which he seemed content.

"It's like this," he explained in an unusual outburst of confidence. "Most of my life I've been lookin' for a place that would just suit me so's I could settle down,

quit driftin', an' call it home. Every man wants a home. Sometimes he finds it soon; sometimes he travels far, and if he's unlucky, sometimes never finds it at all—never! I've found mine. Long Valley, between rocks so high there's only two ways of gettin' in and out of it, and both so narrer they can be shut in with a fence; river through the middle; good grazin' for more cattle than I can ever own; some timber up in the hills; Manipa only twenty miles away; no bad Injuns and no bad neighbors. . . . Peace. Place where a man can sleep without hangin' onto his gun. What better could me and Sioux, after all we've been through—ummh—want than that? Huh? He likes it, and says he: 'Me and you are gettin' old, and damn' tired of shiftin', so let's stay here.' And I told him I would. So there him and me'll stick. . . . Home."

And Horn swore that the great dog that had arisen from between its master's feet, as if rendered apprehensive by such length of speech, suddenly smiled, licked the one hand it knew and loved in all the world, sighed deeply, and again rested content.

"But—wasn't there any place you could find nearer than that?" the storekeeper demanded, and then added, whimsically: "Seems to me you're a hell of a long way from anywhere."

"Me and Sioux are loners," John Barton mumbled thoughtfully, "and are used to bein' a hell of a long way from anywhere, so we don't like too damn' much company."

"Then I reckon that place ought to suit you," Horn agreed, with a grin, as he prepared to take Barton's orders. And from that day onward, with the aptitude for distinguishing appellations that characterized those times, old John Barton was known as "the Loner." Moreover for nearly two years he came, and went, sometimes accompanied by Sioux, more times alone, without men knowing more of him, his ways, or his accomplishments. Veritably a "loner." Save that it seemed his desire, pathetically alone.

THEN, in a single day, Barton came to local fame. Tempted by the sight of a prize rifle that he saw in Horn's window, which he fondled, mumbled over, and admired when told that it was as perfect a weapon as could be made, he succumbed to the storekeeper's facetious urging to "stay in town till the Fourth and win her."



ROY NORTON hails from Kewanee, Illinois, but his far travels have since made of him something of a world citizen. He has long enjoyed a well-merited fame for stories and novels of conspicuous virility and power. "The Vanishing Fleets," "The Toll of the Sea," "The Moccasins of Gold," "The Unknown Mr. Kent," and "The Garden of Fate" are among the books that have won for him this special distinction. The impressive short story of the West which we print herewith is typical of his genius.

He borrowed Horn's rifle and spent a day in the hills "Gettin' the hang of her," and "to see if she's like my own at home." The jest spread broadcast, inasmuch as it was practically a border championship event, to be participated in by some then famous marksmen. On that eventful day his appearance was greeted with a roar of laughter, to which he was oblivious—more so indeed than the dog at his heels, which raised an angry ruff, then stared upward at the Loner as if expecting the latter speedily to punish that derision.

"Go it, Granddad!" was the way the umpire started the Loner off. The good-humored badinage from the crowd stopped after the fifth consecutive bull's-eye. It gave way to admiration at the seventh, provoked murmurs of applause at the ninth and burst into a wild cheer at the tenth. The Loner was too much engaged in pacifying Sioux to give heed. The distance-tests left him well in the lead, but the crowd was almost unanimous in its agreement that at rapid-fire, short-distances, a man of his age had small chance. The comments were audibly expressed. The umpire and both the famous experts protested, one of the latter whirling savagely round and shouting: "Men, you've seen this man Barton do some wonderful shooting. Give him a chance! It's not fair to talk when a man is on such a strain."

The Loner turned, and his clear eyes twinkled as he said: "Thank you, sir. But me and Sioux don't care. A lot of our shootin's been done where a feller couldn't afford to let noise make him miss—but—thanks just the same."

AND then at the signal he threw the borrowed rifle up and with startling accuracy and rapidity made his score. The visiting experts were the first to congratulate him; for despite his years and an unfamiliar weapon, he was point to point with them in the final test, and the prize rifle was his. He had not known that a trophy cup, heavy and ornate, accompanied it, and seemed puzzled when the judges handed it to him. He took it in his big, rough hands, examined it, and slowly a look of profound disappointment settled on his face.

"It's purty," he said, "mighty purty; and thank you kindly, sir. But what do I have to do now to win that there rifle?"

"You've won it also. It was merely an additional prize. Here it is."

The Loner's face was gladdened swiftly as if by sunshine. He clutched the desired rifle to his breast while holding the borrowed firearm in the hollow of his arm. And then, with the silver cup, coveted by experts, dangling carelessly from a finger and bumping his leg, he said, "Come on, Sioux," and made his way out through the now adulatory crowd. He went to Horn's store and patiently awaited the storekeeper's return while the bewildered clerks whispered their astonishment.

"Mr. Horn," the Loner said when the storekeeper, imbued with a new respect, returned, "you was right kind to me. That's a good gun of yours. I reckon you'd not lend her to anybody but a friend. This cup thing—can't drink out of it—no use—aint touched a drop in more'n twenty year, and—" He scratched his chin in perplexity and then brightened as he asked: "You got a woman? Yes? Well, give it to her. Women seem most always to like things that are purty, but no use."

WHEN Horn attempted to make him appreciate the value of the trophy, he appeared unimpressed and in a burst of magnanimity said: "It was right selfish of me! I ought to have let you take your choice. Would you rather have the rifle?"

"Of course not. I'd rather have the cup!"

"Then there it is on the counter—no, on the floor. Forgot just where I put it, but— I wouldn't have said nothin', but I'd sure have been disappointed if you'd picked the gun. Always did want to have the finest rifle in the world—never expected—seems like— Git down, Sioux! . . ."

His words died away as they frequently did, in the folds of his white beard, as if smothered by long repression, loneliness, ineptitude, until utterance seemed waste.

When he went out of the store, one of the clerks laughed, and to his astonishment Horn turned and snapped: "Shut up! There's goin' to be no more jokes about that old man. He put his hand in mine when he told me we were friends. I took it. From now on, anybody who makes fun of him answers to me. I was a damn' fool myself; for, I tell you, even if he don't look up to much, the Loner's a great old man. I saw it in his eyes. He's got something inside of him that counts."

The evidence of trust imposed in Horn by the Loner was not long in forthcoming. It took form in a check which Barton had

received for his first shipment of cattle, and was inclosed with a letter:

I don't like banks. One busted once and busted me. So I wish you'd get the money for this here piece of paper and keep it in your safe till I want it.

JOHN BARTON.

P. S. You can use it if you want to till I want to use it, which'll most likely not be before next spring.

Spring came, indeed, before the Loner called on Horn.

"Goin' to buy some young stuff to run and fatten," he explained.

"John, you can have your money any time you want it," said Horn, "but have you heard about this bunch of rustlers called the Birch Gang? Well, they're a bad lot. It's pretty generally known that they're running whole herds of stock off the range, but so far, no one has been able to prove it on them—that is, if anyone has, he's turned his toes up before he got a chance. Nobody knows that they committed murder, but there's a dozen men been found dead that can't be accounted for. A United States deputy marshal told me confidentially, only last week, that they've been working in Wyoming until it got too hot for them, and that they're thought to have come this way. If I were you, I'd go slow on cattle until this gang is wiped out, or we can be sure they're not out near your range."

The Loner was influenced, and depressed.

"Seems tough luck on me," he remarked. "I done so well out of that last lot, and—why, I was just sayin' to Sioux the other night that maybe we'd have to hire a feller to help us, and buy some farm horses and a plow. We thought of a few pigs and chickens, too, and—I don't know—Rustlers! Bumped into some of 'em—Canadian border—thought we'd got to—everything so peaceful-like and—"

THE storekeeper did not catch the final words, but feeling a great sympathy for this lonely and trustful old man, gave more advice:

"I'd put that money out at interest, and be contented with that for a while. The law will get the Birch Gang sooner or later, and—"

"But I'm only runnin' a bunch of about a hundred now, and—interest? I don't know nothin' about such things. I never had to borrow money, and until now it seems like I never had none to lend."

"Well, all I can say is that even a hundred head of stock is enough to make the Birch Gang move your way if it comes handy. I'd sell them too, if I were you, and wait until things blew over. You're not too young, and you're a long way from anywhere. The nearest neighbor you've got is twenty miles away, and after that not a one nearer than here. I'm not too much of a coward, but—if I was as far from neighbors as you are, I'm not certain but that I'd move out for a while."

HORN went on to tell other gruesome stories of the Birch Gang, of the fact that even sheriffs were not too keen to hunt them, and of the terror which their murderous lawlessness had spread over the range. The Loner sat on a cracker box for more than an hour, his shoulders drooped a little more than usual, his head bent forward, his big hands listless, his whole attitude one of disappointment and depression. He finally agreed, after much more persuasion, to consider the matter for a few weeks longer, but could not be induced to seek a safer situation.

"No, Horn," he said, finally, "I don't allow to be scared out of the country. And maybe they're not in my neck of the woods at all. Maybe they'll not come. I'm sort of out of the way—"

"Out of the way—nothing! You're in exactly the line they'd take if they undertook to run bunches of rustled stock toward the southern border. The Maldai Pass is in a line due south of you, and the open range north! You've got a closed valley where they could lay low and round up rustled steers. You've got the only water and grass in a hundred-mile circle."

"Just the same, I'm goin' back there to stay. Me and Sioux likes it there. It's the first real home me and him's had for years, and—maybe it's all talk and—couldn't find us most likely—no regular trails—hard goin'—ought to have some luck after—"

His voice died away as usual into murmurs; but awhile later he gave his usual order for supplies and promised to return within six weeks.

Dejected, he sat alone in the westbound train that night, seeming to find no interest in the half-dozen other occupants of the coach, and but little in the conversation of the brakeman, who recognized him, and dropped into the seat by his side for a chat.

"Aint you afraid the rustlers will give you a visit, Uncle John?" the young man asked. "We heard on the up-trip that some of the runs a little west of you are missing a lot of steers."

"Nope," the Loner insisted, stubbornly, "they aint likely to come my way."

THE brakeman shook his head at such optimism, and, suddenly remembering that Manipa station was near, got up and hurried through the train bawling the name as if expecting that other passengers than the Loner might wish to get off at such an isolated, out-of-the-world stop. None did. The Loner got off alone, went to the rear of the section house where it was his custom to leave his pack-burro and saddle-pony, collected his meager supplies that had been dumped off the train, made his pack, and rode away over the waste of sand and sagebrush into the late afternoon glow.

Off on the horizon the bleak hills began to appear clear-cut as iron teeth against the skyline, and his patient eyes were fixed on them with the yearning of the wanderer, homeward bound. Great, friendly shapes they were to him, for there, in their heart, lay his valley of dreams and attainment. He talked to his burro now and then, and the long gray ears would stop their listless waving as if to listen and understand.

"Cain't you walk a little faster, Pete? Roney, here, under me aint satisfied with you goin' so slow. We got to get home sometime, you know."

And Pete seemed to quicken his steps, and the saddle-pony to move less impatiently. The desert gave way to sand dunes, to patches of barren, protruding rocks, and finally to stony foothills through which the little cavalcade wound its way with the certainty of familiarity. The hoofs lost their shuffle, and struck sparks from stones. A tiny forest of scrub pines that for decades had fought to subsist was passed; the hot air no longer rippled upward, weaving fantastic gyrating figures in a blur, and the moist smell of water came to the red and dilated nostrils. They came out on a cliff at a spot from which with caution they could descend, and there, nestled below them in the purple haze, rested the cabin and the clumsy out-buildings surrounded by the sea of grass, green with the tender color of spring, but now, in the dusk, a carpet of pale emerald.

The Loner always stopped there and whistled, waiting to hear the distant deep-throated welcome of that loyal watchman left on guard. Always his face took on an expectant and mild glow of enjoyment in anticipation of that sound. It was so on this night of his return. But it proved unlike other nights, for there was no immediate response. Nothing at first but a silence, filled only with the croon of the evening breeze through the pines.

"That's strange—mighty strange," he muttered, and whistled again, listening attentively for a reply. It came at last, in a plaintive, weak yelp, as if Sioux had been compelled to exhaust his powers in a single sound which, faithful to the last, he must utter though it be beyond his strength.

Alarmed, John Barton urged his pony recklessly down the trail that wound back and forth the face of the cliff. And then he saw, crawling toward him with dragging hind legs, and uttering plaintive whines, that strange partner of his, the great mongrel dog. The Loner flung himself from his saddle crying, "Sioux! Sioux! What is it?" He dropped to his knees and caught the dog in his arms. The dog rested there, licking the gnarled hands with hot tongue, whimpering a tale of distress and defeat—endeavoring to explain his first great failure, and his fierce but hopeless fight.

"SHOT, by God! He's been shot three times!" The Loner's voice arose in an excited and angry exclamation. He gathered the dog farther into his arms, and strode toward the cabin muttering words of sympathy, of anger, and of endearment, all in broken phrases, detached, confused, and burdened with his great distress. The pony trudged sympathetically at his heels, unheeded. Behind came the burro, as if intent on sharing this tragic episode.

Barton carried the dog in and laid it on his own bed, before thinking it strange that the door of the cabin should be standing wide. He lit the lamp and looked around. The place was in disorder. A meal had been cooked, and the table was littered with the unwashed enameled plates and broken food. And in the middle of its wreckage, like an upright survivor of debauch, stood an empty whisky-bottle in which was stuck a fork holding a sheet of paper torn from the front of old John Barton's Bible. He held it beneath the lamp and read:

Your little bunch of stock is gone because we can use them. Your dog is dead because he was a fool and didn't know when to quit fighting. So take warning. *Clear out of this, and clear for good.* If we catch you here again when we come through this way, you'll get the same the dog got, which was plenty. And if you are wise, you won't make too much talk about why you left either, because you'll be got if you do.

THE GANG.

FOR a minute Barton stood, bewildered by this enormity, this unmerited enmity, this tragic downfall of his house of peace. His tired old eyes swept the walls of his abode reproachfully, as if they had deserted him and no longer afforded security. The familiar objects had been knocked about by ruthless, wanton hands, curious perhaps, or even malevolent. The sturdy old clock that he had prized had been used as a target, and its brass bowels protruded in melancholy ruin. His mind wandered in aimless, stricken circles, beginning nowhere, ending nowhere, and then slowly steadied. He observed that there had been seven plates used from that proud store of his purchased in distant Big Cañon at an auction sale.

As he gazed, the dog moaned and twisted on the bed. Instantly all else was forgotten. He trudged hastily across the room.

"Sioux!" he said. "Poor old boy! Seven of 'em you fought! Fought 'em all until they thought they'd got you! My God! How I wish I'd been here with you!"

He heard a noise at the open door, and saw that both Roney and Pete were standing with their heads inside, wondering at his forgetfulness and lack of care, their eyes wide with reproach and bewilderment. Apologizing in a steady flow of words, he went to them, took off pack and saddle, and told them to go and help themselves to a drink and food. He tried clumsily to dress the dog's wounds, bathing them with warm water, examining them, and shaking his head and muttering doubtfully; but Sioux, as if soothed by his presence, merely lay more quietly with dumb, agonized eyes following his movements.

Barton cleaned away the table, prepared himself some food, and ate it like an automaton, for his mind was bewildered with shock. In the midst of his meal he remembered that fabulous rifle of his, that most cherished of possessions, and crawled under his rough bunk with outstretched

hands, feeling for it in the place where he always kept it, not for concealment alone, but for dryness and care. He brought it out, swathed in woolen rags and cotton, and patted it with his hands and spoke to it, congratulating it upon its escape. Once more he attended that stricken companion of his, and stood above the bunk scratching his chin through his white beard as if to stimulate resource for such a terrible emergency.

Then suddenly he bent forward and said: "Sioux, it's goin' to be a hard trip, but I reckon we'll have to have a doctor. You see, I aint much good at this sort of thing, so you'll have to put up with it till we can get you somewhere. You really ought to be put in one of them hospertals. I'll go out and git Roney now."

At one o'clock in the morning the lone agent at Manipa was aroused from sleep by the Loner, who carried in his cramped arms, as if it were an injured child, a half-conscious dog, while slung over his shoulder was a burnished rifle.

"Wh—wh—what the hell's this?" the sleepy agent demanded, opening his eyes and staring at the white-bearded old man who peered at him appealingly.

"It's me—John Barton. Sioux's been hurt bad. Shot! You can stop trains, can't you? They'll stop if you ask 'em with that red light of your'n, won't they?"

THE agent protested, disdainfully, volubly, with that official impatience which reaches its worst in only such a station as his. The appeal died from the visitor's eyes and gave way to something hard and stern.

"You say you can't stop a train without orders. Well, I order you to stop the next one that comes through and—you'll do it, too. If you don't—"

His disengaged hand swept upward and patted the barrel of the rifle.

"I mean it!" he declared grimly. "I take Sioux on the next train."

He did. It was a fast freight with trundling refrigerator-cars hurrying fruits from distant Western shores to Eastern markets, and the conductor swore turbidly and threatened to report until he too was overawed by the grim old man with rifle and with dog. Yet that report was never made; because on that long, tedious journey which John Barton was making for the second and unexpected time, the conductor heard the story, sympathized, and cursed

still more volubly with oaths directed at the perpetrators of such an outrage. He proffered advice:

"There's only one veterinarian in Big Cañon, Doc' Mathews," he said. "And I'm not sure that he knows much about dogs; but he's there when it comes to horses and other livestock. A regular human doctor don't know anything about dogs, I reckon. Go to Mathews."

And at five o'clock that morning Mathews was visited by the man with the dog, gun and rifle. While the veterinary examined his patient, Sioux, with mysterious animal intuition, evidently sensed that he was in the hands of a friend, for he submitted to probings and dressings without baring a fang.

"If you ask me," the veterinarian said to the silent old man, "that dog is pretty badly shot to pieces. It would be a mercy to put him out of his misery, because if you don't, he'll most likely be a cripple for life, partially paralyzed."

"Good Gawd!" said the Loner indignantly, and with wide eyes. "Is that any reason to kill a friend? Why, that's the time to stick to him through thick and thin. You don't reckon Sioux would help kill me if I were paralyzed, do you? No-sir-ee! He aint that kind of a feller, and I aint either. If you pull him through, the price don't matter. I aint rich, but I'll give all I got." And then, as his losses dawned on him, he qualified it with: "All I got left."

"Well, leave the dog here, and be sure I'll do all I can for him," Mathews said, and deftly inserted a hypodermic injection of morphia to ease the animal's pain, then showed its owner to the door.

WHEN the sheriff came to open his office in the county courthouse, he discovered a tired old man sitting on the courthouse steps, asleep. The sheriff stared curiously, and then said: "Blessed if it isn't old John Barton—the Loner."

The exclamation awoke the sleeper, who got to his feet and said: "Been waitin' for you, Sheriff."

And as they passed inside, he told of his disaster. The sheriff scowled and clenched his fists when the story was finished, then glared at the written notice issued by the rustlers.

"John," he said kindly, "I wish I could go after them. The Lord knows I do! It's undoubtedly the Birch Gang, and from

now on there'll be trouble around here; but don't you understand that I'm hog-tied like a thrown steer? This is Colorado. You belong in another State, and another county, and I'm not allowed to cross over into Utah to run down cattle-thieves. You should have gone to the sheriff of your county."

"But—but my county's several hundred miles square, and the sheriff is almost a day's journey by train!"

AGAIN the sheriff sadly shook his head and said: "I know it is. And I know that to bring a posse so far takes time and money, and that before it could be done, those steers of yours would probably have been shipped and the thieves starting out to rustle a fresh batch. That's what makes it possible for that Birch Gang to get away with all they do. They're not much afraid of the law in a country like this. All they're afraid of are the cattle-men themselves. It's almost impossible under the law to get them! It's an outrage, but it can't be helped. I don't honestly know what you can do about it. If you had neighbors that could band together to help one another, you might make it too hot for them. That's what they did up on the Wyoming ranges, and that's why the gang's come down into this country. But one thing I'll tell you: if I were you, I'd take that warning mighty seriously, and not go back until, somehow or another, that gang of rustlers is wiped out. It's as much as your life is worth, I tell you, to try to stick there. What does the murder of one lonely man, away off by himself, amount to to them? Nothing! Not as much as that!" And he snapped his fingers.

The Loner sat for a long time brooding helplessly before he said: "Then it seems there aint anything at all that I can do. The law can't help me so—my stock is gone and—they'll take my ranch to use for a roundup of stolen stock."

"That's about it," the sheriff admitted. "But of course, if I were you, I'd get on the train and go out to your own county seat and lay the case before the sheriff. I've met him several times. He's a good man and will do the best he can. But I don't hold out any hope, and he wont, of doing much. I'll give you a letter to him, so he'll know that when you tell him a thing he can be sure it's gospel truth, and—that a lot of us over here like to call you a friend."

But Barton did not travel westward. Disconsolate, harassed, hurt and helpless, he explained the situation to Horn:

"First, it seems it wouldn't get me nowhere, and second, I couldn't leave nohow on account of Sioux. I'm mighty anxious about Sioux. If he don't get well, I don't know what on earth I'll do. I don't see how I could ever get along without him, now. And he cain't get well without me. And besides, if he don't, I wouldn't have him cash in his chips thinkin' I'd deserted him. That'd be the worst of all. Friendship is friendship, and never yet have I thrown down a friend."

And so for eight anxious days Barton wandered like a lost ghost here and there, sometimes far out into the mountains, sometimes through the streets, always unseeing, as if his troubled old eyes were looking into a perplexed and unpromising future; and for hours each day he sat in the sunshine outside the veterinarian's stables with one hand resting on the back of a dying dog. When the end came, he picked the big body up gently, as if still hoping for a responsive recognition from something that in all its faithful life had never failed, carried it out into the hills and, muttering his grief, buried it and made a cairn of rocks to mark the grave,

TIRE from his labors, he sat down beside the rough monument, took off his hat, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and stared off at the tops of the distant snow-bound peaks as if communing with them. At last the old lips beneath the white beard tightened and he stood up. "Good-by, Sioux!" he said. "Where you are now you're all right. Don't worry none about me. I'll just have to get along without you, somehow. Good-by!"

He spoke with the solemnity of conviction—his conviction that God in heaven couldn't be so unkind as to leave dogs like Sioux unsouled and with all their life's fidelity unrewarded after death. The thought comforted him as with firm steps he walked to the town on the plateau below. Just as Horn was closing his store that night, Barton entered.

"John," he said, "I came to buy a lot of cartridges and to say good-by. I'm goin' home on the train that goes through here at three o'clock in the mornin'."

Horn, aghast at such folly, sat down and tried to dissuade him; but his words beat as uselessly as a wind against a peak.

"I know—just as you say—that the law cain't help me," said the Loner, "so from now on I'll help myself. It's all the home I got, and I'm goin' to stay there, dead or alive."

"Then you'll probably stay there dead!" Horn exclaimed, exasperated by such unreasoning stubbornness, and bade him not "Good-by," but "Farewell."

WHEN he took his seat in the train, the Loner attracted no attention; for at that hour travelers slept, sprawling in their seats beneath the half-dimmed lights in an atmosphere that was stale with many odors. And as if relaxed after a long vigil, the Loner slept too, until aroused by the brakeman who shook him to wakefulness. Hugging his rifle and a small bundle of supplies, he stepped off into the sand, blinking as if dazed, and then recovering wits and purposefulness, he went to the shed where his saddle-pony, wearied with long inactivity, whinnied a greeting. For the first time in days the old man smiled.

"That was good of you, Roney," he said, caressing the soft outthrust muzzle. "You and Pete's all I got left now. Sioux aint goin' to be with us no more."

He scanned the manger and the feed-box to make certain that the section men had not neglected the horse during his absence, and satisfied of this, saddled and led it to the foot of the great red tank, where he gave it water. He rode away as the east reddened and lent strange tints and beauties to the sands, the sage and the clean morning skies. But he rode without that wonderful sense of homecoming with which heretofore he had always taken the trail. In place of this kindly, warm emotion, his thoughts were grim, determined, troubled.

The sun was up when, with Roney breathing deeply and sweating from the upward climb, he came slowly out through the edge of the scrub pines to the first view of his cabin. And then he suddenly pulled his mount to a halt, and frowning, glared downward. A column of gray smoke was plumed upward in the still air like a pillar of pale light, and the cabin door was open, as were the shutters over the solitary window at the end. Two men with hats on the backs of their heads sat straddlewise on the homely bench whereon for so long he and Sioux had been accustomed to rest. They played cards as if wholly absorbed in pursuit of gain.

Barton's eyes, stern and alert, shifted and swept over the visible portion of his valley. Strange cattle were there, resting as if they had been cruelly driven in the night or preceding day. Strange horses were there, and he counted them—seven. That telltale number! Seven, just as there had been seven of his plates used before his own herd had been driven away, and—the thought brought flame again to his eyes—when Sioux, faithful old Sioux, had fought to the death.

JOHN BARTON dismounted and carefully led Roney well back into the forest screen. He took the marvelous rifle into his hands with a new clutch, made certain that it was fully loaded, then undid his bundle, took from it a box of cartridges and emptied them into his coat pocket. He trudged unfalteringly back, then by a zigzag route and keeping behind cover—now a rock, now a clump of brush clinging precariously to the shelves of the cliff—gained a lower and closer altitude that commanded both door and window. He carefully selected a boulder over the tops of which grew in profusion a screen of brush. He took off his coat as if going to manual labor, spread his cartridges within reach and then, resting on his knees behind the boulder, thrust his rifle through the screen, brushed his eyes as if to make certain of their clarity, took careful aim and fired. Nor had the echoes of the snapping report come back from across the valley before he fired again. Without a sound the two men who had been playing cards collapsed, as if actuated by common and timed impulse, fell sidewise, and lay twitching upon the beaten earth.

From the cabin door two men rushed into view, looking wildly around. And this time the two rifle reports were so close together that their echoes returned as one, and now there were four men making the last, convulsive, involuntary movements of abruptly extinguished life. Door and window of the cabin closed swiftly as if to shut out the sight; the grazing ponies lifted their heads and stared excitedly as if such sounds were familiar precedents for quirt-tormented speed, agonizing distances, and merciless rowels when they stumbled from exhaustion. The ensuing silence, augmented by contrast, protracted, reassured them, and they returned to their grazing.

Up behind the screen of boulder and

brush John Barton rested patiently, calm, unmoved, un pitying, with the sights of the rifle trained upon the window.

"You showed no mercy to Sioux," he said as if his low-pitched soliloquy could reach listening ears, "and so I show none to you."

He watched the window unblinkingly, persistently, expectantly.

"First of all," he reflected, "they'll wonder if they're surrounded. That's what they'll be afraid of. Afraid a posse's caught up with them at last. Then bimeby they'll take a chance on lookin' out to see, and they'll just naturally try the window first. There's three of 'em in there, sure! Most likely they was still in their blankets when I opened up. Maybe been ridin' hard last night. And then—"

He did not finish the sentence, but fired; and a spot of white that had cautiously appeared at the window was there no longer. Also the glass came rattling brokenly outward and fell tinkling on the bench below.

"I reckon I got that feller—and that as he went down, he flung his hands out and that's what smashed my window," the Loner reasoned. "It cost me a heap of trouble to get it out here and keep it unbusted, but that's just one thing more to charge up ag'in' this gang." He patted his rifle and murmured: "They said you was the best gun in the world, and I'm tellin' you now that they didn't lie none about you." He stroked its blue barrel affectionately, and resumed his meditation with: "Now, the other two that's left'll be too scared to move for a long time, and when they do, maybe they'll come through the door on the run."

FOR more than an hour the same silence, usually so filled with an assurance of peace, but now rendered ominous by the proofs of death stretched motionless outside the cabin, continued. Only the birds in the little forest at the top of the cliffs took heart and resumed the songs of mating spring. The Loner was annoyed by the delay.

"Aint you ever comin' out?" he growled. "I don't want to camp here forever. I want to get it over with so's I can go down and get my cabin cleaned up and see how much damage you've done this time."

If his mind could have commanded his enemies, they would have immediately

responded by opening the door. But it did not. And so, after a time, he fell to a ruse that he had used in situations far more dangerous to himself than this—got a branch of brush, put his hat on it, got one arm behind him, cuddled his rifle aimed at the cabin with the other, and thrust the hat upward.

A streak of fire came from between the logs of the cabin where the chinking had been dug away to make a loophole. The Loner grinned and fired five shots as rapidly as he could pull the trigger, two at the loophole, two at the window, and one at the center of his door.

"Never thought of that before," he commented. "That door's one of them factory made things that a bullet from a first-class rifle like this here will shoot through like it was paper. I hate to spile that nice door, but—"

HE poured a fusillade alternately through the door and the window, splintering the thin panels of the former, smashing the last cherished pane from the latter.

"If that'll only make them believe there's nobody here but me," he thought, "they'll probably take chances on a rush pretty soon." But in this he was disappointed. Furthermore, at the end of an hour he was puzzled by something unusual and not understandable. The smoke from the chimney, that had for a long time been but a slender spiral of heated blue, suddenly gave forth a cloud of steam. For a moment it puffed upward, dissipated, and thereafter there was neither steam nor smoke.

"Thrown water on the fire!" the Loner exclaimed at last as if triumphantly solving a deep problem. "Wonder what for they did that? It'll crack my nice iron stove! Seems like they just do all they can to be mean."

Faint but sharp metallic sounds came to his hearing after another wait, but for these he could find no explanation. The sun gained the meridian, poured showers of heat into the valley and over the face of the cliff, and yet from the cabin came no further sounds. Barton, reasoning slowly, decided that the men within might wait for darkness to escape. The thought for a moment angered him, and he cogitated the advisability of leaving his post, regaining the top of the cliff, traversing it for a mile, finding a way of descent, and then closing in to within

shouting distance. He turned his head and looked back for a route of covered retreat. When he looked at the cabin again, he understood the reason for the strange actions and sounds that had baffled him. Where the window had been was something of lighter color than the solid black of a darkened interior.

"Damn 'em!" he growled. "They've done took my stove to pieces and fastened the top of it ag'in' my winder. They've plumb ruined it."

He took a shot at the steel barricade, and saw a splinter ripped loose from a log at the side, proving that the bullet had ricocheted, and that the shield was effective. It was that which decided him. With the caution and skill of a veteran Indian fighter and frontiersman, he retreated from cover to cover back up the hillside and to the top. Loath to lose time, lest his victims escape in the interval, he ran through the chaparral heedless of thorns, tearing the fabric of what he termed his "store clothes," gained a familiar place for the descent, and rapidly made his way downward. Once a treacherous rock betrayed him, and he fell eight or ten feet, heavily jarring a body no longer resilient with youth, and driving the breath from his lungs. For twenty minutes he rested there on his back, half-dazed, before he could recover—then the iron of his determination drove him on.

KEEPING the outbuildings between him and the cabin, he lunged heavily up the valley until he gained his stable, where he paused to recover breath and rest his aches. He considered the advisability of demanding a surrender, and then remembered that from his vantage point he could cover neither door nor window. His problem was imperative by now, for already the sun was on the quick western lap, and soon the night would fall. And then he fell to cursing his own stupidity.

"Why did I ever come down here, anyhow?" he thought. "There's a full moon and she's as clear as day. They can't try the window to get out, because they've had to fasten that stove-top too solid to get it down without raising a row, so they'd have had to get out through the door. I'd have done better to have stayed up there in front of 'em."

He decided now that if his enemies chose to wait for night, he could do the same, but retreated until he gained the

shelter of a little log storehouse from the corner of which he could keep watch upon the door. The time passed slowly, as if it too were bound in a spell—as if the sun were loath to continue its round until witnessing the finale of this lonely tragedy in such a lonely place. The birds sang their vesper songs and drowsily twittered in concluding gossip. Far up in the valley Pete brayed, the sound coming to his owner fraught with anxiety, or loneliness.

"Poor little cuss! He wonders what's become of me, and Roney, and Sioux," Barton thought as he lay there inflexibly, unremittingly intent on guarding the closed and splintered door. The sun, finally concluding its observation, resumed its perpetual duty and sank from sight. The night seemed filled with a silence that sighed with anxiety. The stars and great round moon, wan in the early dusk, became brilliant lights as the hours advanced, and the Loner thought of his cherished clock, wantonly ruined, and of how proud he had been of its chime beaten out with a brass hammer on a great spring wire.

"She was so loud and fine that if she was still runnin' I could hear her strike clean out here," he thought, almost boastfully, quite like one recounting the value of lost treasure. He remembered with a pang that Sioux had howled and barked, much to his master's amusement, for the first few times when the clock struck after it had been brought "home."

"And now he'll never bark again. Not even when I come back from a trip."

His lips quivered a little beneath his beard and then hardened savagely, remorselessly, when he considered that brutal injustice. There was no pity within him as he stolidly waited for the end.

IT came unexpectedly, and from an unexpected quarter. From the opposite side, where the cabin cast a shadow like a sheet of black velvet on the grass, there came a noise so slight that to ears less acute than those of the pioneer it would have been inaudible. A low, softly scraping sound, stealthy, unavoidable.

"My Lord! It's the winder, after all!" the listening man muttered. He tensed himself for action, then heard a thud as of feet dropped upon the bench outside the cabin window. He waited no longer, but leaped to his feet and ran round the back of the cabin toward the corner, rifle in ready hands.

Two figures in swift motion emerged from the shadow, undoubtedly believing that the blind wall of the cabin was unguarded, and rushed upon him. The Loner fired from his hip, and one man shouted, threw his hands up and toppled backward, and a revolver hurled into the air caught blue glints from the moon. The second running figure fired, and the Loner stumbled to his knees. "Hit!" he muttered, but instantly fired again. He failed to bring down the man who had shot him. The fugitive whirled and fired again, and the kneeling man's hat flew outward like a black vulture of the night taking a short flight in expectancy of prey. Its loss disturbed the Loner's aim, and before he could shoot, his assailant was in flight again, and running toward the shelter of the shed. The Loner, still on his knees took what was for him a long and careful aim, and shot but once; for the runner suddenly bounded into the air, dipped his head forward, took a few more steps through convulsive impetus, and then came to the ground in a heavy somersault and lay there doubled grotesquely, like a gnome resting still in devout adoration of the moon. The Loner calmly got to his feet, paused to consider, fancied he saw movement in that huddled shape, and deliberately fired into it again. A noise behind him attracted his attention, and swiftly he turned, raising his rifle, as he did so.

"Don't shoot again! For God's sake, don't!" an anguished voice implored, and just in time the ready gnarled finger on the rifle trigger restrained itself.

The man first shot had gained a sitting posture and was doubled forward holding his arms tightly clenched across his abdomen.

"Throw your gun!" commanded the Loner.

"I haven't got it!"

"Then up with your hands. Quick!" There was neither compassion nor hesitancy in the harsh old voice. Nothing but the chill and willing readiness to inflict death. The man's hands went feebly aloft, and the Loner strode across to him, assured himself that no arms were at hand and then demanded: "Are there any more of you?"

"No. You've got us all! And none of us even got a chance at you but Tim Birch, him that lies out there by the shed."

"So that was Birch, eh? I'm glad now

that I shot him twice. 'I wish to God he could have lived until I could have filled him full of lead—like he did to my dog. That's mainly why I came back the way I did. I hated to shoot them two outside because they wasn't armed, and then I remembered that Sioux wasn't armed, either."

"My God! You don't mean that you came back on account of a dog, and shot us down one after the other?"

"Just that! I could have got more steers. I could even have got another ranch; but I couldn't get another friend like Sioux!"

He spoke earnestly, as if justifying his remorselessness, his methods, his mental trepidations.

"I've killed plenty of men in my time," he added. "I never have liked to, but they was always trying to kill me, and it was always face to face; but—you fellers weren't worth a fair fight. You were a lot of damned cowards. Not worth my dog that you shot. And so—I shot you like coyotes!"

He paused, interrupted in his anathema by the groans and contortions of the man at his feet.

"After all," he said, softly, "I'm sorry I had to do it—now that it's done. I'm hit myself, through the leg, but you're bad hurt. I couldn't leave any wounded thing to suffer. Wait here, and I'll get into my cabin and light the lamp, then bring you in and see what I can do for you."

HE went into the cabin, found the lamp and stared at the havoc about him. He held the lamp above a dead man on the floor beneath the window, and confirmed the accuracy of that shot fired—was it that morning, or many, many mornings since? Time had run laggardly throughout that direful day of battle. He saw the ruin of his stove and recovered the iron kettle from the floor and carried it outside with the intention of lighting a fire to heat water therein. He advanced to the wounded man, who was now stretched out and moaning like a hurt animal. It flashed through his mind that this sound was similar to that made by Sioux when

the latter came to meet him with dragging hips and feet. The man muttered something about having sold his cattle with others "across the line;" and then, even as the Loner, relenting, strove to pick him up in his arms, gasped and lay inert.

The Loner, limping with his burden, carried it into the cabin and laid it on the bed; but his effort had been wasted, for the last of the Birch Gang was dead. In the light of the lamp Barton bound his own wound, which experience convinced him was painful but not dangerous, and then stood for a moment staring at the lamp.

"I got to get to Roney," he muttered. "He's been up there all day, but—" And then he blew out the lamp, closed the door softly as if fearing to disturb the dead, and with seeming absurdity painfully carried a pail of water in his hand when he limped away to the steeply climbing trail. He gave the horse the water, apologizing meantime in muttered sentences for his neglect; then, with difficulty getting into the saddle, he turned and rode away.

ONCE more the railway agent was aroused from midnight sleep by a battered summons, harsh, imperative, on his door. Once more he came out, complaining, and was silenced by the cold glare in the eyes that pinned his attention.

"I want to send a message and—"

"Can't you wait till morning?"

"I'm sending it now!" the Loner said, thrusting his face forward. "And you'll send it, young feller. Do I have to—"

The agent shrank back from that cold wrath and apologetically acquiesced. He lighted the lamp in front of his counter, afraid to protest, and stood while the Loner with much effort, and care, and many starts, stoppings and alterations, addressed a dispatch to his friend Horn. And the agent gasped when he read in that cramped hand:

Send by first train seven plain pine wood coffins. I've killed the Birch Gang, but as the law didn't help me do it, I aint goin' to bother no coroner. Also send one good iron cookstove and a winder sash reg'lar size, because I got to fix up my home.

JOHN BARTON.

"Spruce Shadows," a remarkable story of the Northwest by William Byron Mowery, who wrote "The Loon Lake Patrol" and other good ones, will be a feature of our next issue. Watch for it.



The Coming of Siti

The fascination that is the Orient—its dark passions, its picturesque splendors, its subtleties of intrigue—holds the reader rapt in this first of a remarkable new series by the author of "The Nawab's Room."

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

TO know the well-springs of a man's character, we should examine his poets. It is they that form our ideals, set the stars in our sky, influence by the unconscious guidance of memory every moral crisis in our lives. Those deathless lines! Strewn in every man's memory are they: lines from the *Elegy*, from Shakespeare, from Omar, from noble hymns, from those grand poems the Bible, the Koran, the *Bhagavad-gita*. A man's working philosophy derives from them: lines remembered word for word and gloated over, lines forgotten, all but the thought, but there, influencing always the course of action, guiding and building character. All the work of poets!

Unfortunately, James Raynor, British Resident of Kota Sembilan, knew little Arabic. Malay he spoke before he ever knew English—as a husky toddler hiding in his *amah's* sarong with childish embarrassment when visitors came to the great bungalow that was Government House for the Raynor Tin Mines of Perak. But of Arabic, only a smattering. It was unfortunate, because Raynor was finding Ibn

Yaïd, the Arab *muntri* of the young Sultan Sri Adika, by all odds the big man of this native state. That tall gentleman of fortune, in the flowing burnous and the draped headgear that came from nowhere in Malaya but from the Nejd, was given to booming sonorous Arabic that Raynor knew *must* be poetry. Ibn Yaïd would occasionally loose such a line in court, where it rang out with the impressiveness of a knell after the sentence of death that he had just imposed. And once, when all Kota Sembilan was stricken with the cholera, and the life of the Sultan himself despaired of, Ibn Yaïd had declaimed a phrase that sounded like the firing of a gun, and Raynor had asked him what it meant.

"Lo, Tuan, thus, in thy language!" said Ibn Yaïd grimly. "For I have seen Doom let out in the dark like a blind camel; those it struck died, but those it missed lived to grow old!" *Kismet! Ya Allah!* Even so with the life of our Sultan, Tuan!"

Fatalism, naked and stark; but its keynote was human hope, and it had braced Raynor to go in and try to cure the Sultan



WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

WARREN MILLER has had a varied career as construction engineer, naval officer, editor of a sports magazine and writer of many books and stories of outdoor life. Yet the call of the East has always been in his blood, for he is a descendant of India's pioneer English governor Warren Hastings; and he has spent the last few years in long journeys about Asia, Africa and the Pacific, finding everywhere fresh and authentic material for the remarkable stories you have enjoyed in these pages.

himself. As a glimpse into Ibn Yaïd's mind and character, it was also illuminating; but all Raynor had asked was: "From the Koran, Ibn Yaïd?"

"*Yallah*, no! That was written by Kureit Ibn Uneif, a Wise One of the Ignorance," had smiled Ibn Yaïd. "There were giants in Holy Arabia in those days! Zuhair, Lebid, Kureit, Antar. . . . None have wrote like that, with the free pen of the bold man, since Mahomet, Tuan. But we who study the ancients—know."

YES, it was unfortunate to be barred by a language from the mind of the great vizier, thought Raynor, as he watched the state barge rowing over from Kwala Djelan with the Muntri seated under the silken shade over her stern sheets. He had news, Raynor hoped. The Resident had sent for him, for an uneasy and indefinite rumor had vaporized out of the jungle and reached his ears; the young Sultan, for some obscure reason connected with Malay *adat*, law, could not be crowned.

Raynor sat at the big Residency desk watching through the window his muster of Sikhs drawn up at salute to receive the Muntri. And Faiz Ibn Yaïd, when he did enter, greeted him with another of those resounding Arabic phrases. A poet himself, this chap, thought Raynor; at any rate, largely under the influence of the great Arabians.

He smiled. "Which means, in common everyday Malayu, Ibn Yaïd?"

"One side has the curry, the other the spoon," grinned back the Muntri. "It is not from the Great Ones, Tuan, but from the little men, the airy and graceful ones who wrote after the Prophet came."

Raynor tugged his bristly mustache and shifted his burly form in the Residency chair. "So that's it! Has to do with marriage negotiations, eh? And I fancy the hand of Shaitan Sadud is in it, what?"

The Muntri wrinkled a long and sardonic nose that seemed forever pinching out of existence his tight, curly, black mustache. "Even so, Tuan! He has called to mind an old Malay *adat* that a sultan cannot receive his state coronation and his investiture under Alexander the Great, unless provided with at least one wife. And the head *parwang* makes oracle that she shall be a daughter of a great warrior."

Raynor thrilled as he thought of the permanency of this East that his jejune race had taken upon themselves to govern.

It was just about twenty-three centuries since Alexander had lived and died; yet the imperial Greek had left his mark so thoroughly upon all the East that the memories of men still held him—even here, in this obscure little native Malayan state. To this day no sultan's investiture is complete without the silver seal of "Ishkander," as the Malays called Alexander.

Then he grinned upon Ibn Yaïd puffily: "Poisonous blighter, Shaitan Sadud! Of course he's plotting to foist his own daughter on Sri Adika with that bally oracle! Otherwise, no coronation. The swine has all the war power, confound him; and as Sultan Muda, all the *parwangs*" (witch-doctors) "will do as he jolly well decrees. . . . Daughter of a warrior, eh? What is in your mind, Muntri?"

Ibn Yaïd eyed him reflectively. "Of course one must obey the oracle of the *parwangs*, Tuan," he said. "Otherwise, *susa*" (trouble).

Raynor nodded. There was no surer way to invite an uprising against any form of white intrusion than to ignore Malay *adat*, however trivial and unimportant it might seem. He recalled a coronation in Trengganu in which the sultan had driven to his audience hall in a modern motorcar; but behind that was a carriage and pair, empty, and behind that equipage still the original painted and bedecked elephant prescribed by immemorial *adat*! An almost fabulously brilliant Resident had endeavored, in the most kindly way, of course, to abolish the expense represented by the upkeep of that elephant—and he was four months sitting on the lid of the native explosion that followed!

Ibn Yaïd threw back the folds of his burnous and exposed a ripe old scar. "Hast heard of the great pirate chieftain, Haroun Mahomet of Acheen, Tuan?" he asked.

"Rather!" laughed Raynor. "Ask the Dutch! They've been ten years now getting on with that war."

Ibn Yaïd's dark Arab eyes flashed humor: "Consider this scar, Tuan. A girl gave it me. A mere chit of a child—with a kriss nigh as long as she was tall."

"Really?" asked Raynor, interested. "Let's hear."

"WE in Arabia have had dealings with Haroun Mahomet too," smiled Ibn Yaïd reminiscently. "It was in a fleet of dhows off the coasts of Acheen, and we

were bound peacefully for Belawan-Deli. And Haroun Mahomet, whose sword is like a flaming fire on land and sea, came upon us with his war proas. They are brave men, those Acheen. But of us Arabs it is written: 'When danger came upon them, they remembered the maker of their sword and the lineage of their horse!' Lebid, of the Great Ones, wrote that, Tuan!" And Ibn Yaïd rolled it off with gusto in the harsh man-speech of Arabic.

"We prevailed, Tuan. And I, boarding a burning proa at the head of my men, came upon her. Alone amid the bodies of her slain in the reeking strong-house on deck was she, a gorgeous child, richly dressed—not so high." Ibn Yaïd spread out a lean hand about the level of his waist. "But a great kriss was in her two hands, Tuan, and her eyes flashed as a tiger-whelp's. Give in—never! *Yallah*, in truth 'tis said of them of Acheen that they will fight all day and then ask for more!"

He laughed.

"And of her I took this scar, Tuan; yea, before I could drive off my men, who would have captured her alive for a slave-girl. For she was a ruby treasure, Tuan, with a mighty heart, that little one! I could not see her broken and soiled to become some amir's concubine. . . .

"That was ten years ago, Tuan. She must be a woman, now, *aiwa*! Sixteen, and ripe for wiving!"

Ibn Yaïd's eyes gleamed as Raynor watched him curiously. The Muntri was not married. In all his years of wandering he had not "wived," to use his own expression. Was it the memory of this chit of a pirate whelp, who had done her best to kill him, that had made all other girls look tame to the Arab's blazing soul? Raynor could fancy him building her up to a fiery womanhood, in his imagination, through the years.

"Such would be *the* mate for my friend and prince, Sri Adika, Tuan!" said Ibn Yaïd. "She would be in truth the daughter of a warrior, as the *pawang's* oracle declares a sultan's queen must be."

Raynor moved impatiently in his chair. This was a wild dream, his own dream, that the Muntri was offering in friendship to the young Sultan! How find this unknown pirate woman now? Would she be of noble blood, satisfactory to Kota Sembilan as mating with a sultan of the House of Menangkabau? And why go to far Acheen for her?

"Why this tiger-woman for our gentle prince, Muntri?" he asked. "Even if you could find her?"

"For the good of the state, Tuan!" said Ibn Yaïd, his eyes distant and far-seeing. "Sri Adika is my friend and my benefactor; but he is weak—has no taste for war, prefers fine clothes and music and the ways of peace—"

"Jolly good thing!" interrupted Raynor warmly. "I warn you, Muntri, that the first hint of war or insurrection around here will bring the ships of my Government, and I could not help it."

"Even so," said Ibn Yaïd placidly. "We are in the hollow of thy hand, Tuan, in truth! But, to keep the peace at home, a sultan with a strong sword is needed. Once wedded to a warrior's daughter, a Rajah Muda will be born to Sri Adika, one with a smiting sword. And canst not read the mind of Sahitan Sadud in all this, Tuan? Lo, the people clamor for a state marriage, for all know our weakness. But send we the go-between for Shaitan Sadud's daughter—soon after his wedding the Sultan dies."

THE MUNTRI was looking at Raynor now under languid lids. Raynor knew how convenient these "deaths" often were, and nodded understandingly. "And Shaitan Sadud becomes Regent," went on Ibn Yaïd as if he had not paused. "Many years. While the little Rajah Muda, if she has a son, is growing up. *That* thy Government would not find—amusing, *aiwa*?" he grinned.

"Certainly not!" said Raynor, hunching his shoulders angrily. It galled him to see how helpless he was before these native politics. How could *he* interfere in such an intrigue as this? He was eager to listen now to any plan that would protect the life of Sri Adika. He looked at the Muntri encouragingly.

"Therefore I go to Acheen," said Ibn Yaïd. "I bring back a bride that is warlike from Haroun Mahomet himself. One that is noble, and whose people are of proven courage. And I dreamed last night that it was this very child of the burning proa herself!" he added with conviction.

"Really? But my Government will heartily approve, when I acquaint them with the circumstances!" agreed Raynor. "It's quite a plan, Muntri, my word! Anything to beat Shaitan Sadud, the blighter! But," he added mischievously, "—be care-

ful that you yourself do not dream that you have been bitten by a poisonous snake, Ibn Yaïd!"

He was sorry that he had said it, immediately after. The Muntri did not smile back. That "dream of the snake-bite" is Malay slang for falling in love. And Ibn Yaïd's eyes were full of pain. The man was giving up his own dream, the most cherished mental possession he owned, the vague intention that some day he might go to Acheen himself and find this girl of the proa and win her. It was his big sacrifice that he owed Sri Adika, in gratitude and loyalty for his patronage for appointing him vizier, the biggest power in the kingdom next the war chief.

"Well, good luck to you, Muntri!" said Raynor warmly, rising in his chair to terminate the interview. They struck hands, and Ibn Yaïd stalked out to the barge. Raynor breathed more freely after he had gone. At least the menace of Shaitan Sadud, the war chief, was again temporarily shelved! And what a lot he owed to these native helpers, those loyal to Sultan Sri Adika—if peace and good government was to continue in Kota Sembilan!

IBN YAÏD sailed on the *Silver Crescent*, a war proa belonging to the Datu Ali Sabut. A green and white thing of beauty was she as Raynor, from the Residency porch, watched her bowling out over the bar. Her broad green sheer-strake swept in a veritable crescent above her snow-white body, from the high stern poop forward to her flaring bows. Graceful curves of orange and green marked the scrolled screen protecting her steersmen from musket-balls and hiding the sullen outlines of her teak strong-house on deck. Above it soared her pale green lateen sails of palm mat, lined by the yellows of bamboo masts and spars. In her white sides scowled three black gun-ports with the shining muzzles of brass twelve-pounders jutting from them and two long eighteens gleamed in the sun at bow and stern.

She was the finest ship of Kota Sembilan's Orang Laut, her Sea People. None too impressive to send to such a famous pirate chieftain as Haroun Mahomet, thought Raynor. It would take Ibn Yaïd about three weeks to reach Acheen and return, allowing a week for leisurely and formal Oriental nuptial negotiations. And that three weeks would be full of anxiety

for him, Raynor decided as the *Silver Crescent* faded into the misty horizon of the Gulf of Siam. He would have to rush along the Residency Island defenses, and above all keep an eye on Shaitan Sadud, study the mind of that ambitious and crafty chieftain.

He began that study at once. After a tour of the earthworks with Rana Singh, to indicate gun-emplacements, Raynor sat him down to explore the mind of Shaitan Sadud. Given a Muntri absent to secure a foreign bride and a daughter of his own who could place the sultanate of Kota Sembilan within his grasp, what would Shaitan Sadud be doing during these three weeks left him? Unerringly he would attack the weak point in Sri Adika's character, his love of the beautiful, of courtly magnificence. He would see to it that not one further iota of war-power would be added to the sultan; but if sumptuous bribes could tempt, they would be forthcoming!

The only thing that stood in his way was Malay *adat*, custom amounting to law. Under it the groom's parents, not the bride's, gave the presents. In this case the State itself had provided the lavish gifts to be paid Haroun Mahomet for Sri Adika's bride. Ibn Yaïd carried these, and with them the thousand Straits dollars prescribed by British law as the monetary price for a sultan's daughter. Added to this pittance was all the sum of jewels and silks and ivories that the Oriental imagination delighted in.

But Shaitan Sadud was Sultan Muda, lord of the Spirit World; and as such could do things through his *parwangs* that contravened Malay *adat*, yet would be accepted by the people because he *was* the Sultan Muda and presumably to him was revealed the Will of the Spirits; so Raynor watched developments warily while pushing on the Residency defenses. There was little for him to do at the Audience Hall. Ibn Yaïd was away, and no cases being tried. All was quiet in the up-country; no intrigues, no uprisings among the rajahs of the *ulu*. Only the eternal Sakai feuds with the aboriginal little black men of the hills went on. The coasts were quiet. There was nothing in particular for the young Sultan himself to do.

A BAD state of affairs, ruminated Raynor disquietedly. Sri Adika had not married at the usual Malay age of sixteen.

That was during his exile days in the reign of the Sultan Mulei Suib. An obscure prince, with no claim to the throne but his Menangkabau blood, yet his elders had decided that it was not seemly for him to marry some unknown girl. But now, as Sultan—Raynor knew the hot Malay "madness." And Zara, Shaitan Sadud's daughter, was beautiful, Raynor had heard, though of course he had never seen her. Tall for a Malay girl, haughty and arrogant like her father, said Ya Israng, the thatch-maker and village gossip.

And then, about ten days later, Raynor got a first hint of what was really going on. From the Residency veranda he observed a procession of painted and richly caparisoned elephants filing down out of the stockade gate. It was attended by all the warriors, the *pawangs* under their spiritual umbrellas, and the *imams* of the mosque. It represented the power and the magnificence of that war chief and Sultan Muda combined, Shaitan Sadud. Raynor growled with displeasure as he studied that parade.

"My word—the swine!" he muttered angrily and with a feeling of utter helplessness before it. "The old reprobate's reversing the ancient native *adat*! He's acting as his own go-between—and offering a dowry *with* Zara instead of demanding one for her!"

IT was a bold and crafty move, the Resident perceived. In one stroke Shaitan Sadud had cut the knot of waiting for any advances from the palace and was bringing a dowry for Zara instead, one that would tempt the finery-loving Sri Adika, as Shaitan Sadud well knew it would. And it was a perfectly safe move. He would get all his treasure back, once he had married his daughter to Sri Adika. For the young Sultan would soon die of some mysterious malady—and Shaitan Sadud would then be Regent for a long period of years. It meant nothing less for Kota Sembilan than a complete relapse into barbarism, Raynor fumed!

He waited until the procession of elephants had stopped in the square before the Sultan's audience hall. The music of gongs and drums and flutes, the banging of muskets and pop of firecrackers, had ceased. Whatever this ceremony was, he, the British Resident, had not been advised nor invited. In the absence of the Muntri, he knew nothing; but it boded no

good to Kota Sembilan! Raynor felt as helpless as if a mere tourist, before it. However it was not his way to sit idle. He called away the Residency barge and was rowed upstream to a small creek beyond the stockade. Here lived old Ya Israng, the thatch-maker. Nothing happened in Kwala Djelan but that Ya Israng knew all about it—and he owed Raynor a debt. He found the old native squatting under his big shed surrounded by piles of dried nipa palm leaves and coir twine hanks. A big sail was in process of making for some datu of the Orang Laut, Raynor perceived as he studied its cut. He greeted Ya Israng with the usual salaams, then sat down for a smoke.

"*Ya Allah!*" 'Tis writ on the cucumber leaf (everyone knows) what is happening at the *balei* today!" said Ya Israng after some careful prompting. "The Sultan Muda visits the Sultan—may whom Allah protect!—bearing gifts."

The monkey face looked up at Raynor enigmatically. Subtle was Ya Israng. That much would he tell and no more.

"To what end?" asked Raynor bluntly. "There is scant love lost between them."

Ya Israng shrugged his shoulders. The monkey eyes gleamed upon the Resident again. "One says that the Sultan will step into the water-tray soon," he remarked. It referred to ancient Malay custom of the bridegroom placing a foot into a tray of water containing a gem, a piece of gold, a ring, and a shaving-knife.

"*Aiwa!*" said Raynor. "And to that end is Ibn Ya'ïd gone to Acheen for a bride from the great Haroun Mahomet."

Ya Israng grinned. "Go thou to the palace, Tuan!" he warned. "A bird in the jungle told me that all is not well with these gifts of Shaitan Sadud—may Allah blight him utterly!"

He spat out that last curse. Raynor understood. It was the cry of the down-trodden *ryot*, the humble peasant, who hated war because it took away his sons and his substance, for quarrels of no concern at all to him. The plain people of Kota Sembilan loved not Shaitan Sadud!

IN the barge once more, Raynor was rowed in state to the Audience Hall. Sri Adika was, as usual, dressed magnificently, and he greeted the Resident with his customary warm and grateful cordiality. But there was a worry lurking in his eyes, hesitation, uncertainty. His

private room,—the seraglio, it would be farther west,—Raynor noted was piled with gifts, a glory of Eastern art, great Chinese vases, glowing silks, a profusion of ivory tusks intricately carved with a network of figures, furniture in ebony and mother-of-pearl, Damascene filigree of silver, golden and jewel-studded ornaments, jade—but never a weapon. The gifts of Shaitan Sadud were arranged in a sort of design; Raynor turned about after a silent examination to discover another set of gifts opposite, piled contemptuously on a plain teak taboret. Sri Adika frowned as he gazed upon them; Raynor, grasping their meaning at once, bit his lip with consternation. *How* had the crafty Shaitan Sadud ever heard of Ibn Yaïd's love-story and guessed what might very well happen? For those gifts were three, and each said the same thing, *betrayal!*

"What make you of these, Tuan Besar?" asked Sri Adika uneasily. "They are a hint from our Sultan Muda, who knows all things through the *Hantus*" (spirits).

RAYNOR studied the three articles on the teak stand. They made a humble contrast to all that magnificence fronting them. They were a plain amber marriage-necklace, broken; a dragon-headed armlet, lying in two pieces; and a pair of virginal jade ear-studs, chipped and mutilated.

"The one is Zara," said Raynor, waving a hand over the Sultan Muda's treasure and speaking straight out his thought. "The other, this princess whom the Muntri brings to thee from Acheen. The armlet and the necklace say that she has broken the troth and deserted thee for another; the mutilated ear-studs—no maiden." He eyed Sri Adika significantly.

"*Hai!* Faithless and perfidious Ibn Yaïd!" growled Sri Adika. "Never will he return from Acheen!"

Raynor could not say yes or no to that, nor insist boldly that such a betrayal was unthinkable in the faithful Muntri. The hot blood of the Arab and his strange love-story still dwelt in his mind. Suppose Ibn Yaïd *had* found in Sri Adika's bride his girl of the burning proa? And that cherished love of all these years had burst forth beyond control? But Raynor nevertheless spoke out forcefully in Ibn Yaïd's defense:

"Who seated thee on thy throne, Sri Adika?" he asked sternly. "Who clave to thee when all men sought thy life in the

jungle? Who has given thee faithful loyalty from the very beginning? And would a man like Ibn Yaïd betray such a trust as bringing home the Sultan's bride?"

Sri Adika's brow darkened. "Who is this unknown?" he exclaimed petulantly. "Is she a daughter of Haroun Mahomet, or of some obscure datu of Acheen? I know nothing, save what the Muntri told me, of her charms. And it is whispered that he loves her himself."

Raynor cursed inwardly the craft of Shaitan Sadud. Somehow, somewhere, the story of Ibn Yaïd had got to his ears, and he was making here a double play: a play upon the love of fine things engrossing the young Sultan, and a play upon his suspicions, easily aroused in a Malay. The Sultan Muda was far too subtle to make any direct statements—only these dreadful hints—that the girl was faithless, and that Ibn Yaïd, taking the rich State dowry to buy her withal, had, like an Arab gentleman of fortune, just stayed in Acheen.

Raynor tried a new tack: "*Aiwa*, Highness!" he said with the air of putting the whole Acheen matter aside. "The lady Zara, then. I would stake my life on Ibn Yaïd's fidelity, but—'Her whom the Sultan looks upon, he may take,' as your proverb has it. Thou must decide. And then? Thinkest thou all these pretty things will be thine?" he asked meaningly, and waving a big hand toward Shaitan Sadud's treasure.

"Why not?" pouted Sri Adika. "It is true that it is not our custom; one presents to her father *for* the bride. But when a rajah would marry his daughter to a sultan—"

"Quite so. And not one spear, one kriss, one musket among his gifts—not one elephant of all the train that brought thee these, O Sri Adika!" Raynor reminded him with force. "That means that all the war-power is still to be his. And it is to the Sultan Muda that thy warriors are loyal, Highness—"

A growl of impotent rage interrupted him. Sri Adika did not like to hear such blunt truths. Then he drew up proudly: "Let him dare!" he said. "Tuan Besar, I am of the house of Menangkabau! What Malay, from Sumatra to Johore, would dare raise kriss against such a one! Did we not tolerate Mulei Suib, tyrant though he was, because of that? The Rajah Shaitan Sadud but commands our war-

power, even as thou thy Sikhs; but his orders he takes from me, the Sultan."

"O youth!" said Raynor with fatherly commiseration. "Let be, then. Take thou his daughter to wife—who becomes regent, if aught should happen to thee?"

THAT was better. It said nothing direct, but Sri Adika's handsome face contracted to a scowl. Something would without doubt happen to him, once Shaitan Sadud and his daughter were installed in the palace! The hussy was quite capable of poisoning his food.

Raynor had played skillfully upon the Sultan's fears, but he left the palace longing for Ibn Yaïd's return. How strongly would his warnings hold young Sri Adika against the bribes and hints and innuendoes assailing him from the headquarters of Shaitan Sadud on the hill? Raynor felt that he had played native politics and played them well; but it was difficult for a Resident immersed in his own commercial duties—surveying harbors for recommendations to the Secretariat, pushing on exploration for Roads and Forests reports, laying foundations for a future bureau of Mines and Plantations—to keep closely in touch with all the intrigue going on at the court.

And then a northeast typhoon broke along the whole East Coast. Raynor was for a time cut off utterly from his own kind; even the wires to Penang, via Kwala Lipis in Pahang, were down in the jungle. A typhoon on land is to be spoken of with almost the respect it demands at sea. Whole coco-palm groves were blown down or their trunks snapped off short. Villages were razed flat, great areas of rice lands inundated. The Residency itself bade fair to be swept away, roof, bamboo walls and teak flooring, in that enormous gale that lasted a week. The river rose and washed away most of his earthworks. Raynor was taken up with the mere business of keeping alive, and was for a time entirely defenseless against the guns of the stockade on the hill. *Susa* (trouble), the Malay's favorite word, and a worse curse than work, was camped right with him now!

Rumor followed fast on the typhoon. Many proas had been shipwrecked. There was wailing in the mosque. And worst of all, it was the month of Shaaban, when Allah shakes the Tree of Life and men drop like dead leaves. The typhoon said

that terrible was to be the Wrath of God this year—yea, by the Smiting!

And of course Shaitan was ready with his reason. He held a big religious convocation up in the stockade, and equally of course his head *pawang* made oracle that it was because the Sultan was dallying too long with his wiving, so that there was no Rajah Muda, no crown prince, as a prop for the state in case of his death.

Raynor hurried over for an audience after gathering that gossip from Ya Israng.

"My royal palace, it leaks like the devil, Tuan!" greeted him the Sultan, beating about the bush as usual. "Never was such a storm! And in the month of Shaaban, too."

His eyes met the Resident's evasively, and Raynor knew that something was indeed up. "I hear that a go-between leaves the palace tonight for the stockade, Highness. Is it truth?" he asked Sri Adika directly.

"Without doubt there are mighty liars in Kota Sembilan, O Tuan Besar," smiled back the young ruler.

"Yea, mine ears thought it was folly!" said Raynor, feigning relief. Inwardly he was exasperated beyond measure with this shifty and evasive people. But he loved them, for all their tissues of lies! "Think, Highness, how it would look if you did that!" he went on argumentatively. "You send your vizier bearing presents of State to Acheen, seeking a bride from the mighty Haroun Mahomet; and then, before there is any returning, you take to wife the daughter of one of your own rajahs! *Aiwal* With fire and sword would Haroun Mahomet repay that insult! My Government would not smile upon such a serious breach of Malay *adat* as that, either."

SRI ADIKA knew well that it was so, that when once the go-between had offered his presents and contracted for the bride, there could be no withdrawal without offense unforgivable. Now he showed his hand:

"Runners tell me that the *Silver Crescent* was lost during the typhoon on the coral reefs of Pahang, O Tuan Besar," he announced. "Therefore there is no bride from Mahomet—and no Muntri either. Lo, I stand doubly bereaved!"

It was all news to Raynor, but he knew how swiftly rumor travels through the jungle ever to doubt it. He was beaten at last, beaten by the cruel caprice of Nature

and her typhoons, by the craft of a wily and ambitious rajah, by the vacillations of a sultan who could not resist the bribe of things beautiful and therefore desirable above all things in his eyes. Sri Adika was bent on possessing these glories of Shaitan Sadud's wealth. They were still there, on exhibition in the seraglio, so that all the kingdom might see and admire. For them—the honor and fidelity of Ibn Yaïd was but a negligible thing; the danger of having Shaitan Sadud for a father-in-law, nothing; the certainty of affront to Haroun Mahomet should this rumor of shipwreck prove false only something to be dismissed with a shrug! Raynor saw trouble ahead for the English influence, thick as glue; but it is a trait of all Anglo-Saxons never to know when they are licked. Like Paul Jones, he had hardly begun to fight yet!

"Who knows that this rumor is more than a lie hatched by Shaitan Sadud himself!" he retorted to the Sultan's news stoutly. "My word! Most convenient for him, isn't it? It absolves thee, in honor, from thy obligations both to Haroun Mahomet and thy faithful Ibn Yaïd! And fearest nothing, Highness, with Shaitan Sadud living intimately with thee in the palace itself?"

The Sultan drooped his eyelids. "Life is brief, Tuan!" he said. "Is Shaitan Sadud's, then, invulnerable?"

RAYNOR choked back a gust of ire. Disgustin' lot, all of them! Fancy poisoning one's own father-in-law! But that was what Sri Adika meant. He would take no chances with the war chief so uncomfortably close to him as living in the very palace. Of course Shaitan Sadud would move in, with the help of his daughter, although that was not Malay custom, either.

This last vainglorious idea of Sri Adika's—of trapping the wily Shaitan Sadud himself—was foredoomed to failure. But confound it—it had beaten *him* finally, Raynor knew!

Briton-wise, he would not admit defeat: "I like not this, Highness!" he objected desperately. "Nor would my Government approve. Rulers do not poison their own rajahs, nor do men dismiss their honorable marriage contracts on any mere rumor! I demand that you wait!" He crashed down a burly fist on the arm of the chair with forceful emphasis. "Let us

know that this is no lie! If the *Silver Crescent* is *not* lost at sea, you will have betrayed both Ibn Yaïd and a sultan whose temper all men know is short. It means war, Sri Adika! Also complications between my Government and the Dutch, and direct interference by the warships from Singapore. Would you risk all that on a mere rumor?"

Raynor had risen and was pacing up and down in his indignation. Sri rose too, thus tacitly terminating the interview. He had agreed to nothing, promised nothing. And then one of the Residency Sikhs presented himself at the seraglio door with a *tar* (telegram) in his hands. Raynor snatched it and tore it open. It was from the Resident at Kwala Lipis, giving the list of Kota Sembilan proas reported as lost off Pahang during the typhoon.

And the second name on that list was the *Silver Crescent*.

Raynor felt himself going! It was all to do over again at Kota Sembilan! The old barbarous rule of a reactionary sultan to face! But his first thought was of Ibn Yaïd.

"Thou and I, Sri Adika, have lost a loved and faithful friend!" he announced the news in his wire solemnly. "Ibn Yaïd! Peace to him! He was the greatest man thy kingdom held! *Hai!* Woe to thee, to all of us, Highness!"

"It is truth, then?" asked the Sultan. Raynor could not read his eyes; confound the fellow—did he not appreciate all that he had lost in Ibn Yaïd!

"This *tar* leaves us no hope," sighed Raynor. "Of course there will be no marriage festivities until the kingdom duly honors the memory of its lost Muntri?" he asked, still hoping to gain time somehow.

"In truth, no!" said Sri Adika. "I shall command that all solemnities be observed at the mosque." But he did not add that the go-between would *not* leave the palace that night for Shaitan Sadud's stockade! That marriage seemed a settled thing now. Raynor wondered gloomily what the future was going to be for all of them in Kota Sembilan.

A GUN boomed out sullenly, arresting both men to listen. The bad news had gotten around. All Kota Sembilan knew it, now. It was a minute-gun for the dead; but Raynor thought that it did not sound from the direction of the stockade,

but rather with that unmistakable *spank* of a gun fired over water. The tiniest spark of hope began to revive in his breast.

Again the gun. Then the voice of a muezzin rang out from the mosque, his high-pitched cry, "*Alla-ah il Akbar!*" thrice repeated. Raynor listened eagerly: mourning or rejoicing?

And then he jumped a foot, and it was *not* because of the third gun, but because of the next cry of the muezzin; for instead of "*Hieya alla sala!*" (Come to prayer), he was chanting: "*El hamdu il-lahi, rabi alameen*" (Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds)!

Raynor gasped heavily and choked down a happy sob of relief. That gun came not from the stockade but from a proa in the offing! A hubbub of excitement was growing rapidly in the village. The townsfolk were yelling, grabbing muskets out of their houses to fire them, setting off cannon-crackers. All the gongs in the mosque were clamoring. Ibn Yaïd had arrived, at long last, with the royal bride—and steadily those guns of a royal salute kept on!

"Come!" said Raynor, strong, joyful triumph in his tones. He and the Sultan went out in the Audience Hall and gained a window that looked out toward the Residency island and the wide mouth of the Djelan River extending beyond it far down to the open sea. Off the bar down there lay a proa; and as they watched, still another white puff of smoke burst from her, followed by the distant report of a gun. And from her mainmast head flew the great green flag, with Arabic characters in gold fretting it, of Haroun Mahomet!

"Ibn Yaïd!" boomed Raynor, utter thankfulness filling his voice, "he could not have returned on the *Silver Crescent* at all, Highness! And this proa, sent by Haroun Mahomet himself, means that thy bride is indeed royal! *Pish* for those baubles and a rajah's daughter!" He waved a hand toward the seraglio where Shaitan Sadud's bribes lay piled.

Sri Adika nodded. His eyes gleamed. Like a child with a new toy, he was looking with eager interest now upon this foreign proa bringing him he knew not what beauty and loveliness. He would receive no dowry, but rather had paid immense treasure for her; but that way lay honor, and strict adherence to Malay *adat*. And there would be no disgruntled

whispers among his people, no jealousy from the other rajahs who too had daughters; instead, acclaim from all his kingdom in that he had made a match that honored the State as all men wished it to be honored.

Raynor took his leave cheerfully. The Sultan would be busy preparing a belated reception for the bride during the next few hours. He would do the thing up in style, Raynor was sure!

He had himself rowed out to the Residency where he could watch the show from its veranda. The state barge, of gleaming gold, all fluttering with priceless silks and gay with flags, passed him soon, on its way out over the bar to the proa. All Kwala Djelan was rejoicing on shore as it rowed out, noise without limit, every gong in the village ringing. Even the stockade was firing the required nine guns. Shaitan Sadud could do no less for a princess royal, however much his nose might be out of joint!

And after a time the State barge came back. Raynor saw under its canopy a gleaming red lacquer palanquin with cloth-of-gold curtains. In it was the bride from Haroun Mahomet. He would see her, for the first and only time, at Sri Adika's coronation. Raynor was consumed with curiosity as to who she was. Noble, of course; no less could be sent from one sultan to another. But was she by any chance the girl of Ibn Yaïd's dreams? Or had he been lucky enough to find his child of the burning proa in the daughter of some minor chieftain, and perhaps had brought her back as his own bride?

RAYNOR had not long to wait to find out. The State barge swept on to the general landing, but all his attention was now taken with a second boat from the proa. *It* bore no bridal palanquin! Raynor noted that with dismal forebodings for his old friend; and it was heading directly for the Residency wharf. Raynor ordered out his reception guard of Sikhs and sat down to await Ibn Yaïd.

A tragic and hopeless rhythmic cry in Arabic announced the Muntri's entry into the Residency reception room: "*Ya jemali! Khudni anta makatib fi ma-ut!*" "O Camel-driver! Take thou word to a dead man there!" he gasped out. "I do not wish longer to live, Tuan!"

Ibn Yaïd sank despondently into a chair, his sole greeting that bitter cry of Lebid's

that has wailed down through the ages in the souls of men. The faithful Muntri slumped in a long and shapeless form of bones and covered his face with his burnous.

Raynor knew all, then. She *was* Ibn Yaïd's girl of the burning proa! His own soul was overwhelmed with pity over the moving story of love and renunciation here revealed. He put his hand gently on the Arab's shoulder. There were no words that he could say, only the silent sympathy of contact.

Ibn Yaïd roused himself presently from the stupor of collapse.

"*Ya Allah*, Tuan! Easy it is to talk of renunciation—bitter the reality! But in honor have I brought her to my Sultan. . . . And now I wish but to die."

"OW! Not a bit of it, old chap!" growled Raynor in a sympathetic rumble. There was nothing adequate that he could say—just the tones of sympathy in his voice, the words did not matter.

Ibn Yaïd tottered to his feet, his eyes feverish and hectic, his lean arms trembling as he threw back the folds of his burnous. Patently he had been under a terrific mental strain for days.

"Listen, Tuan: Siti Ishtar Mahomet is she, daughter of the great Haroun himself! He was among those we thought slain on that burning proa, and she the child who stood over him defending his body with his own kriss. Was ever such a strange thing in all Islam? A maid of the harem on a fighting proa! Yet alike is she to Haroun as two camels in Mecca.

"Of who Princess Ishtar in truth was, Tuan, I knew nothing while at their court. Her face I never saw, as is our custom. As an ambassador of Kota Sembilan, I but made forward with the princely negotiations. And of my girl of the burning proa—not a clue. . . . One does not speak openly of womankind among my folk, the Presence will comprehend. But even then in my soul I knew that it might be so.

"And then—O Merciful!—one night during the returning home, when the little moon was shining and we were talking through the palanquin curtains, as a Muntri might to a young bride going to a far country—she told me, Tuan! Of an Arab of long ago, and of a sea-fight and of him who had saved her, the big romance of all her young girlhood! 'His eyes are like

the eagle's, and his beard a yard long!' sang Siti Ishtar to me through the veil that was drawn. Know you that love-song of Zuhair, Tuan? Music, but of me it tore out the heart! 'His sword is like the sun-rays! His voice as the trumpets when the horses ride forth to war! And I shall love him forever!' sang Siti Ishtar. 'I take refuge in God, Tuan, was ever man so tempted? For then I knew who she was, and that we had been born into the world for each other. But honor sealed my tongue.

"'Why so silent, Muntri? Lovest not the poet Zuhair?' —O Allah! Her voice, like the silver bells in the great mosques! *Ai-wa!* Strong man that I am, I became as water with the torture of it—I that dared not speak a word more, lest she know and I betray my Sultan's trust! For who can kill the memory of a living voice, Tuan? And had mine stirred her to this tale?

"Then came a whisper through the curtains like the thin tinkling of a *zef*: 'Thy voice, Muntri—methinks—once, long ago. . . . Lo, on a sudden I loved him though he had slain my kin!' she sang on the song of Zuhair.

"*Mashallah!* Ah, me! Weak, faithless, perfidious! Where was then the honor of the Beni Yaïd! 'Lo, princess royal, here am I, that same Arab!' said my tongue for me with the madness of Zuhair upon us both. By the Light, Tuan! Yea, before I could cover with my burnous, the curtains had parted, and Siti Ishtar sat, all unveiled, before me!"

IBN YAÏD by this time was fairly delirious with the intensity of his scene. The man staggered before Raynor, his hands shaking, his eyes burning. "O Beautiful! As an houri from paradise! O Allah! Allah! Mine own eaglet of the fearless kriss! Another's, plighted—yet on me her eyes blazed with that love of all these years! Lo, the scar!"—he indicated the old wound. "She put a little, so little, finger upon it, and knew that indeed I had spoken truth! Need I tell the Tuan more? One moment of bliss was ours. Then darkness, night; for what could the Honor of the Desert do! I saw her not again, spoke no more through the curtains. O Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate!"

He crashed over into the chair, his head covered with his burnous. There was a space of silence, while again Raynor's big

and sympathetic hand lay on the heaving shoulders. A moving story, this, of bitter renunciation and hopeless love! Raynor cast about in his mind for the best means to draw his old friend out of this slough of despond. Action, work, the affairs of State; it was the only antidote! He shook him: "Also art thou Muntri of Kota Sembilan, Ibn Yaïd," he said sternly. His British instincts were all against this giving way to despair. No man could sympathize more over the enormous sacrifice that Ibn Yaïd had been called upon to make; but this was a world of action, of men and things, and one had to live on and do his part in it.

"Thou art *her* Muntri, now, Ibn Yaïd," he reminded the vizier. "Soon is the coronation, and she will be queen. Allah is good that he has permitted you to live in the same kingdom with her. Cherish that in thy heart, old friend! Thou and I, we have much to do here: to guard her always, to develop Kota Sembilan, to guide and lead the weak Sultan. I have had a purple time with him while you have been gone, my word! Shaitan Sadud—"

Ibn Yaïd sat up as if struck a blow at that name. It gave him just what was needed, an enemy, a force opposing his, something to be met, thwarted, defeated. He listened with interest as Raynor went on to describe the crafty Sultan Muda's latest intrigue. Raynor was glad to see that reviving energy! An Oriental can kill himself by the mere negation of the will to live. Ibn Yaïd would have pined away with the bitter-sweet of hopeless love without such an antagonist as Shaitan Sadud. Also that rajah was now a direct menace to the Arab's beloved Siti Ishtar. Shaitan Sadud would not long accept this new twist of affairs that had once more snatched the sultanate out of his grip! What he would do next neither man could tell, but—

THEY shook hands on it when Raynor had done talking. "And why be dead, Ibn Yaïd, when Allah alone knows what changes may yet happen in little Kota Sembilan!" said the Resident with hearty

finality, slapping the Muntri on the shoulder as he clinched his argument. "Somehow thou remindest me, Muntri, of a great man of my own race—Abraham Lincoln. He too once made a bitter renunciation, the presidency of his own great country, a country so big that one could put all Kota Sembilan in one small corner of it and men would scarce know that it existed. This Lincoln gave way, for reasons of state, before a more brilliant man, who took seat in his place in the Council Besar of his nation. But look you, Ibn Yaïd! Within four years the plain people of that mighty nation had chosen him over all as their Grand Vizier! And today all the world bows down before the memory of his name. . . . There is much of the poet mixed in with the statesman in thee, O Ibn Yaïd! It is like the poet to despair; but the statesman suffers and endures, for he knows that Allah watches over all."

IBN YAÏD arose with dignity at that, and straightened himself to the height of his tall stature. He flung a fold of his bur-nous over a shoulder in the familiar gesture that Raynor knew so well. Then he smiled somberly as he took the Resident's hand in farewell:

"So be it, Tuan! *Yallah!* Lo, I continue to live, for her! It is ours to wait and serve, is it not? *Ai-wa!* As thou hast said, it is a gift of Allah that I live in the same kingdom with Her! And like that great white man, mine it shall be to suffer and endure."

"That's it, isn't it!" grinned Raynor encouragingly upon him. "Stick to the jolly old guns does it, eh, what?" he joked cheerfully.

And while Ibn Yaïd went ashore in the boat to receive the rewards of a more or less grateful Sultan for his fidelity, Raynor sat musing over this little native principality that he had been sent out to govern. A whole world in miniature it was! Life, love, intrigue, and death—how exactly like the great outside world! And human nature varied not a hair's-breadth in all that world, anywhere.

"The Sunggei Tin Mine," the next story of Mr. Miller's fine group of authentic Oriental dramas, will appear in the next, the February, issue.



An Ace in the Hole

Our friend the old newspaper proprietor, Hiram Inkwell, again takes a hand in big events—and much excitement follows.

By JOSEPH BLETHEN

THE OLD MAN had a way of pressing the buttons on his big flat-top that made the buzzers sing, talk, or snap out commands, as his mood might be. When his playful fingers sent over the wire a musical "Ziz-z-z—Ziz-z-z—Zizz-Zizz," like the singing signal of a smoothly steaming giant of the rails, the recipient went smilingly to the desk. When a busy digit sent along an economic "Ziz-Ziz," the receiving end of the line snapped quickly to the Presence. But when his pudgy thumb pressed down hard and shook the room with a snarling, rattlesnake's "Zing-g-g," the startled wage-slave winced at the sting in it, rushed to the Old Man's office, and stepped forward on the official carpet with his fingers crossed.

On this particular morning, old Hiram Inkwell, editor, publisher and proprietor of the *Daily Outstander* shot a particularly stinging "Zing-g-g-g!" to the desk of Bill Screech, the managing editor. Bill winced. Everyone in the room looked up. There was an ominous silence. And then: "What the hell now?" remarked Bill Cuts, from the city desk.

Bill Screech slammed across the spaces toward the chief's door at a gait not to be chronicled as a dignified approach. He did not answer the city editor. Not on your life! Nobody in the room expected it.

The door closed on the managing editor's obedient shoulders, and the room heard a deep, booming voice opening the subject. The tones were in key with the "Zing-g-g-g!"

The room twisted in its chairs and resumed work. A deliberate and positive indifference to hurricanes, earthquakes or floods settled on each countenance. Who wanted to be a managing editor, anyhow? Let Bill face the music. Served him right!

The Old Man went right to the point. "I see by the cashier's statement for yesterday that you paid my young friend Craft two weeks in advance. What'd you fire him for?"

"Matter of discipline, Colonel. Had to do it."

"DISCIPLINE? Well, that's one thing we must have. I'm strong for it. But disciplining a flying ace back from



Photograph from Wide World Photos

BURNING oil-storage tanks at Monterey, California—the spectacular conflagration which is so vividly described, in this deeply interesting story of newspaper work, by the author of “The Romp of Circumstance” and “The Old Law and the New.”

France seems like pressing it a bit. Craft got past Pershing all right, but he collides head on with you. What did he do; get stewed?"

"No sir. So far as I know, he doesn't drink."

"Not stewed, eh? What, then? Did he get sassy?"

"No sir. It's this shell-shock stuff. I assigned him to go down to Del Monte and go up in a plane with an Army pilot and take some air shots of the polo tournament. He said he couldn't go up any more. The sight of a plane gives him the wiggins. His heart does flip-flops and tail dives."

"Oh, I see. The shell-shock made a deuce spot out of your ace. And you call that discipline?"

"Yes sir. Our men must take orders. They can't welsh out on physical weaknesses in an emergency."

"You consider a blinkity polo game an emergency?"

"The Prince is to play. I wanted some snappy pictures."

"Well, couldn't you have left Craft on the ground and sent some other photographer aloft? What was the matter with sending that movie star of ours, 'Lord' Stryne?"

"His Lordship' was assigned to fly out over the Farallones and take the battleship practice. Now I've switched. I've sent Stryne down to snap the Prince, and Burke is out at the fleet."

"Yet I don't see—"

"It was this way, sir. We've hired one plane to go out over the fleet. A commercial plane from Sanderson's air-port. I didn't want to hire two. So I sent Craft out to Crissy Field to see Lieutenant Horan. Craft and Horan are aces from the same deck—they flew in the same squadron in France. Together they persuaded the colonel in command to send Horan down to Del Monte with our man on board. I was trying to save the sheet money. Naturally, I had planned to send Craft with his buddy, Horan. When the time came, Craft flunked. Horan was for backing out, too. He has no use for Stryne. The Army don't like 'His Lordship.' He's a bit undiplomatic in his admiration of anything and everything British. He thinks the Fourth of July was George Cohan's birthday and nothing more. But Craft persuaded Horan to go on for the sake of the sheet. All I've got to say

is, I hope he don't wreck 'His Lordship' just out of revenge."

"AND after all that you fired Craft to maintain discipline! Well, for one thing, you'll get no more planes from the Army. You've antagonized the whole Crissy Field bunch. Technically, you may be right. But diplomatically, you're a flop."

"Shall I recall Craft?"

"Not on your life. You'd spoil him. He got through the War all right and came home and went to work. But if you put him back now it might go to his head. He'd be calling me Hiram in a week. And it would be a weakening influence on the staff. Very bad! Just get word to him to drop in on me. Maybe I can use him on our advertising side where his only flights will be flights of fancy. But I've a suggestion for you, by way of business. Get word to our correspondent down at Monterey to send a photographer over to Del Monte to get a few ground snaps of that polo fuss. It'll be good insurance. Chances are, Lieutenant Horan will do didoes with Stryne, once he gets him in the air, and get him so seasick he couldn't even snap a kodak, let alone sight one of our hifalutin' long range Bettys. Don't forget that a man may retain a sense of humor even if he is in the U. S. Army."

"Yes sir."

"And another thing: The more I think about borrowing a plane from your Uncle Sam, the less I like it. Why don't we throw our business to the commercial airports? In one case you're the Army's guest, and how the heck are we going to reciprocate? In the other case we boss the aerial taxi around to suit ourselves, pay our bill, and we're done. Besides, I keep roaring on our editorial page over the importance of the air-craft in business, send Bill Mix around to work 'em for advertising, and then you go borrow a plane from Colonel Jinks of the Air Marines. It don't look good. From now on let's hire our own kites or let our men walk. That's all. And don't forget to dig Craft up for a date with me."

"Yes sir."

THE managing editor recrossed the spaces to his desk. His step was rapid. His jaw was rigid. Not a man looked up. Not a typing machine missed a click. Each and every man of them

knew that no matter what brand of brimstone had flared in the inner office, whiffs of it would come whirling down the line in due time.

Screech promptly got a certain newspaper in Monterey on the long-distance wire. It was the paper on which the local correspondent of the *Daily Outstander* earned his regular check. Screech was informed that said local correspondent was on his vacation.

Could the neighboring contemporary send a photographer to the polo game, take pictures, rush the plates by express, and send bill to the *Outstander*?

The neighboring contemporary's one and only camera-shooter was already on his way to the field. Duplicate prints would be sent when ready. Best they could do. . . . Very well!

Then Screech called Craft's boarding-house and learned that the former employee of the *Outstander* had left San Francisco flat and gone down to Carmel to visit his brother, Wallace Craft, the novelist and, incidentally, the girl in the case. Promptly, a telegram was snapped off to Craft in care of Craft, Carmel. It was a rather stiff invitation to get in touch with the Old Man.

NOW Carmel is just over the hill from Monterey, and Del Monte lies alongside and just between Monterey and the United States. All the "Chick" Evanses know this. So did William Screech, managing editor of the *Daily Outstander*. But now this fact struck him with all the freshness of newly acquired information.

Craft had gone down to Carmel, which was next door to Del Monte! He would be at the polo game to watch Lieutenant Horan do didoes with Stryne. If anything happened to "His Lordship," Craft would have a laugh on the M. E.

Pride said, "Forget it. That country correspondent will send you plenty of pictures. But prudence said, "Craft belongs to the sheet till his two weeks are up. Wire him to get on the job."

Pride said, "The *Outstander* is too big an institution to yell for help from any discharged employee. Wait an hour and poke up that country correspondent. Nothing's going to happen to Stryne, anyway. His pilot is Lieutenant Horan, of the United States Army. Safest pilots alive—those Army chaps— And discipline! Craft is out! Forget him!"

Pride won, and the M. E. drew a dummy to him, and commenced outlining his first page layout. Twist and wiggle as he would, the Prince seemed to be the best first page story in sight.

So he planned it that way, with a space for an air picture of the players on the field (cut to come), and a flock of follow-up pictures (carry to page four, second news section).

Nor did he forget to call the city editor to him and roar loudly over the lack of pep in the day's crop of local stories.

Brimstone! The whole staff smiled over their copy, and felt easier.

EDMOND CRAFT was not at home when the telegram arrived. Prudently his brother the novelist opened it. It read:

At your convenience, Hiram Inkwell, proprietor the San Francisco *Outstander*, desires your present address.

(Signed) Screech, Managing Editor.

"At your convenience." The novelist propped the telegram between his brother's hairbrushes and returned to his desk.

All Carmel writes, and paints, and chisels most secludedly every forenoon. Many a front door bears its morning placard: "Busy. Do not disturb." Eddy Craft had taken his lonesome way through those lonesome lanes and felt doubly depressed. Everyone seemed busy at a chosen task and only he discarded. Discharged, let out, given the gate! And why? Because of the one scar the Great War had laid on him—a bunch of nerves that went goofy when he looked down from an elevation!

And just when the work was going so well! His news pictures were as snappy as the best work of the photographic staff. His human interest stuff had drawn compliments from the Old Man. And there had been two raises of salary in ten months.

Oh, well! He would rest a few days and try again. There were other newspapers. Even if San Francisco wouldn't have him, there were other cities. And tonight he'd go over to Pacific Grove and see *her*! Too bad to be obliged to go just now. He had hoped that on his next visit they could have made some plans. Plans for the future, with her in it. Too bad to come discredited when he had hoped to come with a promotion. Well, it was the

War. The scar on his nerves. She would understand—and wait. She was that kind. A good soldier. And tonight. . . . Just now he'd sit under a tree and watch Horan do his stuff. Good old Horan! Nerves steady, and all that. Still flying for Uncle Sam. Ready for anything. Lucky! Well, if we can't perform we can carry water to the elephants. . . .

SLOWLY Eddy Craft took his way up the ridge that rises out of Carmel, and discloses, when the crest is reached, that bit of Italian bay fringed by the oaks of Del Monte. Irresistibly, in his loneliness, he was drawn to that ridge so that he might watch Horan float out of the mist and drift inland over the polo field. As he planted himself on the brown crest, his back against a tree, his binoculars ready, his camera by his side, he felt like a discarded, broken-voiced singer perched in the top gallery of a great opera house waiting for the captivating strains of a swinging overture to herald the approach of a former co-star, who, still in possession of his voice, would presently sing as of old and win the applause of the waiting thousands.

He, a decorated and famous ace, known for his daring exploits in the bristling skies of far-away France, must in his own California cringe as a helpless worm against the earth and watch another flyer wing peacefully through this unarmed September blue.

He was not envious of Horan. He had no hate for Stryne—but helplessly and wistfully he watched yonder gap in the Santa Cruz hills through which he knew Horan's plane must soon come whirring on its untrammelled way from Crissy Field.

Through the forenoon he watched, and toward noon saw Horan wing smoothly out of the hills, circle lazily in the signal over the Presidio, and descend with easy glides to the Army aviation field.

Then he took his solitary way down to the smiling blue harbor, ate listlessly at a lonesome lunch-counter, and dragged back again to his tree on the ridge.

AT three that afternoon Eddy Craft caught the distant *whir-r-r* of an aerial motor, picked up the plane with his glasses, and watched Lieutenant Horan climb in long circling inclines.

The lazy upward spiral fascinated Craft. He unconsciously shoved back against the

tree. Subconsciously he was piloting that very car aloft. He could actually feel the lift of it, the rush of the wind on his cheeks, and the shriek of the taut stays pounding on his ear-pads.

Suddenly he straightened. Horan had thrown a series of beautiful loops and again started for altitude. Why? No pictures could be taken from that height. And he wasn't bearing toward the polo field. Instead, he was circling widely over the bay. Was it just for the joy of flying—of soaring, and dipping, and tossing aerial somersaults—or was he deliberately testing the nerve of his observer? Craft wondered—and watched intently.

More loops, and then a dive, and then a sudden loafing, a swaying not comparable with Horan's skill as a pilot. Irregular puffs of smoke. Then, a slowing of the propellers till the loafing blades made a circle clearly seen by the human eye.

Craft sprang to his feet. His experienced eyes read tragedy. Up there were Horan and Stryne, and Horan's engine had gone dead!

EDMOND CRAFT, ex-ace, could feel the sickening tremble of a dead plane. "Down—out of control." He knew!

He saw through his binoculars a man squirm from the cockpit and hang over, his parachute on his back. Then the figure clambered back. In long glides the plane gained momentum, to be sharply checked by an upward turn. But each glide brought the airship nearer its inevitable crash to earth.

Why didn't Horan jump clear? And where was the observer—Stryne, the guest passenger? Each had a parachute. Craft knew very well they must have, for it was a regulation of Army flying. He stood staring, as cold as Horan's dead engine.

The plane continued its alternating plunging and momentary checking, as a powerful horse, running away, might be pulled up partially from its mad rush, only to shake its head and plunge on again. But the intent of the pilot was clear—he was volplaning inland from his perilous altitude over the bay. To fall in the waters of the Pacific would mean drowning—pulled down in a tangle of torn wreckage. To reach the sand of the beach might win the long chance of a shake-up just short of death-dealing.

Then Craft suddenly guessed it: Stryne couldn't or wouldn't jump. For his sake,

Lieutenant Horan was breaking regulations. Instead of jumping clear of a falling plane, he had returned to his controls. He was sticking to a falling ship, risking his own life on the flimsy chance of saving that of a helpless civilian.

The plane was shooting crosswise of Craft's line of vision. His straining eyes measured the distance—*Horan would make it!* —And then—oh, merciful God!

Dead ahead of the runaway, slightly up the beach, and nestling on a long flat, were a cluster of giant steel tanks—the familiar oil-storage tanks of California. Horan had over-shot his chance, and the plane had struck head on into the side of the nearest steel monster.

Craft saw the plane crumple, and fold to earth beside the tank. Then there came to him clearly the grinding, snarling screech of metal ripping into metal.

And through his brain there flashed the thought of a new danger for those two stunned and helpless men—*fire!*

Craft charged along the dry and brown ridge to the highway, his camera caught like a football under his arm, and frantically waved down the first of many passing motorcars.

"I'm a reporter," he yelled. "There's an airplane just ripped open a big oil tank over there in Monterey. Rush me to it!"

"The speed cop—" ventured the motorist.

"I'll tell him! He'll go with us!"

BUT there was no need for words. The gasoline from Horan's bursting tank had ignited, setting fire to the flood of oil bursting out of the ripped tank, and the flaring heat did its work.

Standing on the running-board of that racing automobile Craft heard the roar of the exploding tank, and saw flames and smoke shoot skyward. He went sick. Not one chance in a million that those two over there had escaped *that!*

But they had escaped—the miracle had run true to the end. Horan, dazed and bleeding from a gashed forehead, had staggered out of the wreckage and then seized on and dragged clear the broken-legged Stryne. The flash of the flaming gasoline had spurred on the ace to play his last ounce of strength, and when the tank let go with its mighty roar, he and his helpless human burden were safe behind the next tank. There helping hands seized them and bore them out of danger.

Craft found them propped against a building, awaiting the ambulance, while crowds, panic-stricken at the explosion, milled around them. He pushed through the surging mob to Horan.

"I was up on the ridge," he exclaimed. "I saw the whole thing. Old man, you used your nerve!"

"It means a court-martial." Horan's tone was level, but his hands sought the red-stained towel that swathed his head.

"No, it won't," said Craft. "The Old Man will get it straight. I'll tell him. He'll stand by you."

THEN he looked at Stryne,—Stryne writhing with the pain of a broken leg,—his camera and plate cases still dangling from his shoulders—a mussed-up Stryne, but game!

"My fault," groaned Stryne. "I asked him to do some stunts. I got seasick. Then his fuel-pump jigger went goofy. He signaled me how to work it by hand, but I broke it. Then he tried to make me jump, but I went goofy like the pump. Something broke in my head. I hung on like an idiot. Next thing I knew we mushed all up— God, I'm beginning to get it!— Lieutenant, why didn't you jump clear? It would have served me right!"

"He's not that kind," snapped Craft.

Horan turned an aching head toward Stryne. "You were in my keeping, sir. You'd have done as much for me."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. But look at all this muss for a damn' polo match. And we've set the town on fire." Then suddenly: "Here you, Craft! Forget you were fired. Take these damn' things and go get pictures!"

Craft stood staring.

"He's right," snapped Horan. "I broke my regulations, Buddy. Now you break your pride. Don't let your Chief get scooped."

Out of the roar of the fire, and through the hubbub of the panic-stricken people, they heard the welcome note of the ambulance gong. Trained hands laid hold of the wounded.

"Here they are. Take them." Stryne tried to wriggle his trappings from his shoulders.

Craft looked at Horan. Two cold eyes were leveled on him. His own gaze dropped. Meekly he took the camera and the plate cases. As he dragged across a

crowded street, going toward the fire, he was shaken by the roar of a second exploding tank.

AT three in the afternoon the Old Man released his leader for the next morning's edition. It was a rip-roaring appeal to his party to stand by the presidential candidate and incidentally rescue the State of California from the pack. He had waved the flag very successfully in the breezes of his own sweeping paragraphs. To use his own expressions, he had given the pack "hell and repeat," and proven clearly that unless rescued from the grasp of the present official incumbents, the State would "go to Hades on a toboggan." Furthermore, there was a bulging schedule of advertising for the morning. The sheet was making money. He decided to call it a day and go to his club.

But just to make sure he pressed a button. The device sang pleasantly. Bill Screech got the atmosphere of the musical "Ziz-z-z—Ziz-z-z—Ziz—Ziz," and loafed across the spaces. He even sat sidewise on the edge of the big flat-top.

"Did you get that correspondent at Monterey?"

"No, Colonel. He's on a vacation. But the *Herald's* going to send us dupes of their own shots. Of course, they're after the Prince strong down there."

"Fair enough. Did you locate Craft?"

"He's down there, too. Went to Carmel to visit his brother, Wallace Craft. The bird that wrote 'Little Guns in Big Cañons.'"

"Ah! And coincidentally to fraternize with Lieutenant Horan. Must be grief to him to see another ace performing. Too bad his nerves are crossed all up."

"I wired him to get in touch with you," continued the M. E., evading the unpleasant subject of Craft's flunk.

"All right. Any tidings from Horan and 'His Lordship?'"

"Nothing yet."

The Old Man pulled out his watch, snapped open the case, got the time, and vigorously snapped it shut again. He smiled meaningly at Screech. "My bet still stands," he said. "A hat to a hand-out that Horan gets Stryne so fussed he can't take pictures. And Craft's down there to be in on the revenge. Don't blame him. I like his sense of humor. I can capitalize it on the *Outstander's* business end."

A boy opened the door. "Monterey on the phone, Mr. Screech."

The M. E. bolted away. Hiram Inkwell's bronzed face relaxed into a smile. "Business of settling a bet," he said aloud, and going out to the managing editor's desk stood silently behind that worthy's chair.

"Hello, Craft," he heard the M. E. say. "Get my wire? No? I addressed it to your brother's house. No. No rush about it. The boss wants to see you when you come back to the city. What's that? Well, I'm glad you did. We won't be ungrateful." He reached for a pencil and a sheet of paper. "Well, what's the story?"

Hiram Inkwell smiled again. Then, as he saw Screech slump close down to his phone, he became set. Like a hunting-dog, watching an interesting clump of bushes, he waited.

"Horan's plane!— Were they hurt?"

THE OLD MAN slid over to Miss Jorgan's desk,—Miss Jorgan was the M. E.'s secretary,—brushed her away, sat in her chair and took up her phone. It was an extension of the M. E.'s. The Old Man had cut in on the wire, but neither the eager Craft nor the excited Screech knew it.

The room watched intently. They saw the Old Man's face go hard. The city editor crossed to his side.

The Old Man covered the transmitter with a pudgy hand. "Big fire in Monterey," he whispered. "Oil tanks exploding. Horan's plane fell and mushed one of 'em. Dig up your Monterey pictures and your Crissy Field stuff. Hell of a spread for the Bulldog." Then he settled back to the phone.

The room shot into action. A boy rushed to the morgue for pictures. Artists were summoned. The composing-room foreman appeared out of nowhere. And Miss Jorgan took up notebook and pencil, drew a chair opposite the tense M. E.—and waited. Reporters drifted to the C. E.'s desk and stood silent. There would be orders.

AS Craft turned from the phone he heard a man say, "There's another tank gone. That makes three."

"How many tanks in that one field?" Craft inquired.

"Eleven," answered the man. "Mostly crude oil. But they've got some gasoline

around there some place. If any of that stuff goes up—oh, boy!”

“What kind of buildings are near by?”

“Docks, warehouses, canneries. Fishing boats galore. And the Government arsenal. Say, if the wind changes, Monterey is gone!”

Craft stepped out to the street, his own camera and Stryne's camera and plate cases dangling from his shoulders, a heavy load. He gained a point of vantage and stood watching the mountains of smoke from the burning oil heaving upward in mammoth inter-twisting clouds which blackened half the afternoon sky.

He had told the M. E. that he would get bulletins on Horan and Stryne, watch the fire, report again in half an hour, and then get his pictures off on an early train, not forgetting to include the *Herald's* “dupes” on the polo game.

His next move would be to telephone the hospital for news of the two injured men.

But as he stood watching the smoke, the fourth tank let go with a roar. A new Vesuvius augmented the cataclysmic masses of black fury. He noted the white faces of the men about him. He thought of Pompeii, and the real Vesuvius. He had a glimpse of human terror about him. What must the utter horror of that other day have been!

SOMEHOW he was cool. He hunched his cases around to ease his back. Then he had a thought—and shuddered. He put it from his mind and looked again at the white faces, and at the hurrying, panic-driven mortals. In his look there was a hint of apology. His glance was the glance of a guilty man looking sidewise for a possible menacing shadow.

But the thought returned. He looked at the sky—clear blue to windward of the black, seething, towering masses of smoke. The thought persisted. He should be up there—there in the clear sweeping blue—commanding all this turmoil from above, and nailing this wild fury to the cold memory of his photographic plates.

He looked about, as a wistful boy might look, for a good safe tree from which to watch a parade. But there was no magic tree to lift him safely into the blue.

“My God!” he murmured. “Why can't I fly any more? Why can't I? *Why?*”

It was a cry of pain. More, it was a prayer.

THE news instinct in him roused Craft to action. If he could not bear looking down from high places, there were men who could. He would go to Helen. She was in a photographer's studio, studying to be a help to him in his profession. She'd know who could take air views; who could fly for the taking of them.

He raced to the studio. Helen was out. Her day off.

The proprietor—a young man—was a live one. Sure, he would go up and take pictures. An air-port? Well, not exactly an air-port, but there was a fellow over in Pacific Grove who had a plane. Took people up on Sundays. Five dollars for five minutes.

“How about an Army plane?” suggested the photographer.

“No chance,” decreed Craft. Already the Presidio was snapping into action. Every soldier was fighting fire or removing explosives from the arsenal.

They found a taxi. The driver was standing on top of his car watching the show. He made excuses. Craft spoke sharply and the driver came off his high place.

They were obliged to take a roundabout way to get through the fire zone. They found the flying field. As they raced across it, they saw a woman sitting alone in the idle plane. They reached it, and Craft stood staring.

“Helen! What are you doing here?”

“Eddy! When did you come down?”

In their surprise, they ignored the fire roaring yonder. The photographer stood silent, impatiently bored.

“I came down this morning. I'm—I'm off duty. Then this fire started. I'm trying to get pictures.”

The girl sat silent a moment. Then her eyes kindled with hope. “You're going up, Eddy? You're flying—again?”

Her eyes cut him like knives. He turned away momentarily. Then he straightened. “I'm sorry,” he answered. “We are looking for a flyer. Where's the owner of this thing?”

Helen La Honda saw the grim lines in his face. She became instantly the sympathetic helper. “He's ill,” she replied. “But possibly—”

She looked off at the towering smoke, then back at him. Again hope shone in her eyes. “Eddy,” she said, and her tones were appealing, “I've been taking lessons. I've been up alone twice. I've been hop-

ing,—I thought,—well, if you could go up with *me*—a little at a time—you might—”

The photographer realized that he was inadvertently in on a private wire. He walked away a few steps and stood watching the black mountains of tumult that piled the sky with wanton play. He stood till he heard the air-craft's engine bark. Then he turned.

The girl was at the controls. The man was climbing to the observer's seat—wide-eyed, and white. The girl signaled the photographer to hold—and the plane took off.

The photographer watched the plane as it inclined gracefully from the field. The purr of the engine gradually faded. Up and up in long easy rises the plane gained altitude. Then with a sweeping bend, like a gull on the wing, the plane swept along the beach away from the fire, away from the town, and glided on as though the pilot were floating in a dream there in the air.

Over those jagged rocks below Pacific Grove where the wind-bent cypress assume fantastic shapes, the plane swung seaward, returned up the strip of sandy beach and, in long and lazy dips, descended to the field. As the photographer ran to the car, the blades slowed and came to rest.

SEEMINGLY, a new man clambered out of the car. A new, yet not new, Eddy Craft took control, and the girl changed to the observer's seat.

“Give me a cap,” said Craft.

“Give me those cameras,” said the girl. “I’m going up with Eddy.”

The astonished photographer obeyed orders. He tugged at the blades; the engine fired; and the blades whirled lazily, then gripped, and the plane took off with a defiant roar.

It is possible that in that waning afternoon certain panic-stricken people, counting with added terror the monotonous roar of successive explosions, noted a plane patrolling about the air lanes around and above that mountainous smoke. Certain it is that sundry sport lovers saw a plane swoop low along the length of the polo field, a woman leaning clear and making snaps of the play. Certain it is that Horan,—a bandaged and bitter Horan,—resting in the sun of the hospital porch, saw the plane from the Presidio and guessed it was taking pictures. But he turned his tired eyes away.

His pain made him listless. He wondered why Craft hadn't looked in.

THE OLD MAN liked the rush, the confusion and the final accomplishment of a big news break. So he stuck around. To add to the M. E.'s troubles, he ordered his editorial page made over.

“Send Dictum here,” he demanded. “I’m going to have two new leaders. One will be a large howl on the importance of aviation in national defense. I’ll tell the citizen and the taxpayer that the Army’s program must be supported. That’ll help me square the sheet with the colonel out at Crissy. The other one will be an appreciation of the nerve of the American flyer. Here’s Maughan, who flies across country alone in one day. Here’s Smith and his bunch pioneer around the world, and here’s Horan sticks to a falling plane to save a civilian’s life. I’ll make it so strong they won’t dare court-martial him. And have somebody meet the train to grab Craft’s pictures. You’ll have a rush at best to catch the home edition.”

The managing editor returned to his desk. In a hazy sort of way he remembered there was a train leaving Monterey at about seven or eight in the evening and making the run to the city in four or five hours. But just to satisfy the Old Man, he would check in on the Southern Pacific. He reached for his phone. But the bell rang in his very face, and the operator announced Monterey calling Mr. Screech.

“All right. This is Screech.” He settled to the phone expecting to hear Craft’s voice. Instead there came strange and eager tones to him. . . . “What’s that? You’re speaking for Craft? Where is he? . . . On his way here? . . . Flying! Did you say Craft was— Yeah, I got you. . . . By seven?— That’s great— Yeah! But wait a minute. What did he get? . . . Fine! Oh, my God! Really? . . . Right back? He’s going to fly right back to Monterey? Well, what for? . . . What? Married tomorrow?— What? . . . A story? I’ll say! But who is she? Helen *who*? . . . Sure! Niece of old Garcia La Honda? I got you. Old Spanish family. Boy, oh boy! . . . All right, we’ll meet him. —’By.”

The room saw the managing editor snap up his receiver, sprawl face down on his desk, his head on his arms. His big shoulders rolled from side to side.

Cuts, the city editor, raced to him.

"What's the matter?" asked Cuts, laying a hand on that heaving back. "What's up?"

Screech struggled to his feet. His eyes were glassy. He talked at random, and he talked to space.

"What do you know!" he yelled. Then he choked, and then he laughed. "That damn' Craft! That bunch of nerves! He grabbed a plane. Flew it himself. Took his girl up with him, and they got everything in God's world. They flew over a tank just as it exploded and they got it! My God, they got it!"

"Did they get the polo stuff?" It was an excited cub who asked, a radiant infant standing six feet two in his arrogant youth.

Screech groped about with his aching eyes till he located the irreverent one.

"Sure, sweetheart," he replied, and he made a sweeping bow. "Sure, they stopped the fire long enough to get the polo stuff. Oh, dear, yes! Their day would have been ruined—utterly ruined—if they hadn't got the Prince!"

He steadied a moment, but only for a moment. Again he choked and reeled about on his unsteady feet. Then—

"And Craft is flying back with his girl and the plates. He'll be at Crissy by seven. Get a move on you, you damn' skates! Go meet him! Go! Go!"

And the hysterical executive shouldered his way across the gaping room through the Old Man's door.

WHEN Craft slid down to a dusty stop at Crissy Field, the Old Man was standing beside the colonel in command. The two veterans had talked at length, but as the plane swooped in they stood silent, two elders watching the game of youth.

The newspaper gang grabbed the plates and raced for the plant. The colonel and old Hiram collected Craft and the girl and whirled them to the colonel's home. There, with the colonel's lady as a radiant chap-eron, they held a celebration.

About ninety-nine per cent of Crissy Field flew down to Monterey next morning—flew in formation, the colonel in command, and Craft's plane playing the part of the honored party being duly escorted. The colonel's lady went along, and old Hiram endured his first flight, being

Honorable Observer in the colonel's plane. Hiram was up early, getting ready for the ordeal and cursing himself for being an old fool. Just what sort of a girl was this Daughter of the Dons that could smile into his old eyes and make him do a thing he had said he never would do? Yet here he was up early getting ready to fly over the Santa Cruz mountains with an Army colonel to be at her aviation wedding! Darn the new generation, anyhow. Too peppy!

THE *Outstander* flashed the word to Monterey, and that historic Presidio properly welcomed the invading armada. Cheering, they trooped up to Horan's cot, bundled him up in blankets, and carried him off to the wedding.

A few hours later, on the wide veranda, overlooking the dreamy Pacific, the three old ones gathered about a dusty bottle from the musty cellar and held high confab. To the three—old Hiram, the Army colonel and Uncle Garcia La Honda—there was but one subject for conversation—how had she done it?

"Some girl, your niece," said Hiram. "Studies photography to help her newspaper husband. Learns to fly to help her man get his nerve back. Yeah! And he gets it. I'm glad now my fool newspaper fired him. It gave the girl her chance. And serves us right, too. We train him to chase news pictures and now he's to help the new uncle run about half the peninsula of Monterey. He's going to make news instead of chasing around picturing it. And I know one managing editor who won't be so cocky for a month.

"And while I'm talking I'll say. I'm not apologizing for Eddy Craft. I don't have to. I'm proud of him. And with a wife like he's got he has an ace in the hole that will make us all take notice. Just watch him go. And I warn you now. If I ever buy a plane for the *Outstander* I shall offer him first chance at the quarter-deck.

"The colonel and I know that discipline is necessary, but you and I, La Honda, know that out in the open there's something that beats it—initiative! I'll bet on—

"Now, don't shove me too fast. Remember, officially I'm a Volsteader. . . . Well, Uncle Garcia, here's to your children. My best! How!"

Another of Joseph Blethen's lively stories will appear in an early issue. Watch for it.



Easy Street Experts

"The Holiday Haul" details a new and most enjoyable episode in the careers of two amiable rascallions who are gourmands for food and gluttons for adventure.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

"I DON'T mind saying that if I'd only known the kind of garbage they cooked and called food at this hotel, I'd never have risked my digestion by coming here for a holiday," complained the Honorable John Brass as he sat with his partner, Colonel Clumber, one morning, on the terrace of the very large and very new hotel which had just been opened at Harromouth, that said-to-be-rising seaside resort on the south coast. The Colonel did not answer—he seemed sullen.

"Those red mullet tasted more like bad bloaters painted pale pink," continued Mr. Brass. Then, as though pleased and slightly surprised at the pat alliteration, he repeated it. "That's it—like bad bloaters painted pale pink," he said.

Colonel Clumber stirred impatiently.

"The soles were carrion—cooked carrion," he remarked antagonistically, obviously believing himself as much injured as his partner—who nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, they looked carriony," he agreed. "It seems to me that we can't do better than to take that little furnished place down by the cliff end for a month. We

shall either starve, get poisoned or have to make a habit of ordering a liqueur of anti-septic fluid after every meal if we stop here."

The Colonel nodded, and rose.

"You're right, Brass," he said.

The Honorable John rang for a waiter, and ordered the motor round. But as the man went to ring up the garage at the back, a look of doubt suddenly crept into Mr. Brass' eyes.

"After all," he said, "hadn't we better walk it? Donald sent us here for exercise—and it's only about a quarter of a mile."

The Colonel nodded, and they left the terrace.

It was the old trouble—weight—that had brought them to Harromouth. Vaguely disturbed by the rather noticeable increase of adipose tissue which had obtruded itself upon them during the past winter, they had consulted Sir Donald MacRee, the expensive specialist, who, recognizing after a short conversation that the age of miracles was past and that therefore it was folly to suggest their maintaining a more frugal table, had recommended the burly

partners to go to Harromouth for a month, there to play golf and otherwise take exercise. Carefully ascertaining that the golf-links were flat, without any of the miniature cliff-climbing which is a feature of so many courses, the partners had followed the advice—with sad results.

So they decided—rather reluctantly—to walk out and inspect a furnished house which the day before they had noticed was offered to be let.

"If I didn't feel pretty sure that Sir Donald knows his job, and when he said, 'Harromouth for *you* two,' he meant Harromouth for some good reason of his own, I'd sooner have put in my month's cure at Brighton," said the Colonel frankly, as they strolled along. "This place is too much like a half-built beehive for me. Look at 'em. Like a lot of cockroaches in corduroys—swarms of 'em!" He pointed with his stick to the long strip of beach where hundreds of stalwart British workmen were building a new esplanade and pier in that quiet, old-fashioned, leisurely style for which the British workman is so justly renowned.

Mr. Brass regarded the toiling multitude with an air of mild benevolence.

"Yes," he said at last, "there's a lot of 'em there." He paused thoughtfully. "They represent a pretty tidy sum in wages every week. What would they draw, do you reckon? A pound a head?"

THE COLONEL laughed—a hard laugh, for in his day he had employed the British workman in large quantities.

"A pound!" he said. "You're thinking of Indian coolies! Those gents with the pickaxes over there would despise anything under the average of about three pounds a week, eight-hour day, double for overtime, if not more, and so on. This esplanade and pier and breakwater business is a 'rush' business too, I've heard somewhere, and I expect they charge extra for that."

The Honorable John surveyed them musingly.

"You surprise me, Squire," he said. "Why, their wages-bill all told must add up to—what? Four thousand a week, paid out in ready money, I suppose."

"Quite that," replied the Colonel.

Mr. Brass sighed.

"Seems a lot of money," he said. "It's a pity we couldn't get it one week."

The Colonel nodded. "True," he said. "So it is."

Mr. Brass smiled pleasantly and continued to watch the corduroyed crowd.

"It wouldn't interfere with our holiday to any extent," he remarked presently. "Let's talk it over."

WITH this end in view they sat down on a bench close by—a bench that was placed a few yards back from the edge of the cliff which at this point was not higher than some ten feet. The Honorable John had opened his mouth to speak, when the voice of some unseen person on the narrow strip of beach below the cliff struck suddenly on their ears.

"If yeh think yeh can work it better than me, yeh'd better *do* it," said the voice rather shrilly. "But yeh can't, and yeh know yeh can't. And yeh can shut up. I put it to him straight. 'Mr. Fairborn,' I says, 'take it from me that the men'll come out in a week if they aint squared one way or the other way. I can square 'em,' I says, 'cheaper than you can. I aint been 'Honest Jim' Walcher, chief travelin' representative of the South of England's Navvy's Union for five years, without learning about navvies,' I says. 'It'll cost a good five 'undred pound to do it, though,' I says. 'Things have gone too far. They're beginning to reckon that another three ha'pence an hour's their *rights*,' I says. 'And yeh knows what these great big buck navvies are when they start talking about their rights. So, if you're wise, we'll call it five 'undred, and I'll square the men with it unofficially.' He said he'd think it over, and let me know this afternoon."

"Well, you made a fool of yourself, Walcher," snapped another voice in reply—obviously the voice of a better class man. "That's the worst of dealing with little stiffies like you—you can only think in hundreds. Why didn't you ask five thousand—a serious strike would cost Fairborn and Company twice that, and even the potty little half-hearted strike that you could engineer would lose 'em thousands. Haven't you got it through your armor-plated skull yet that Fairborn and Company have got to finish the work here by June first or pay a penalty of something like three hundred quid a day for every day they take after the first of June?"

"Well, Captain, I thought—" began the first voice, that of Honest Jim Walcher, in much milder tones, but broke off suddenly as a third person spoke, a woman this time.

"Think, dear Mr. Walcher? That is exactly where you went wrong," she said cuttingly. "If you intend to begin thinking, we may as well drop the whole scheme while we're safe. What you have to do is what you're told—just that, no more. Please, *please*, don't begin to think. Your tongue is the asset in this affair—your brains, dear Mr. Walcher, are a liability. Keep them under control."

The partners on the bench glanced at each other as the woman finished her bitter comments, and the Colonel leaned to Mr. Brass.

"Who is she? I've heard that voice before," he whispered. The Honorable John nodded.

"It's Echo—Echo Paley, the woman who ran that gambling club off Bond Street," he said softly. They had met the lady before—she was an adventuress of unusual ability.

They waited, listening. But evidently subdued by the razor-edged irony of Miss Paley, Mr. Walcher had lowered his voice and the partners could hear no more than a slight rumble.

"Let's have a look at them," suggested the Honorable John. "It sounds as though there's money in this."

They rose, and walking some two hundred yards along the cliff, descended a flight of steps to the beach and strolled quietly back along toward the point from which the voices had risen to them. In their tweeds they looked exactly like two prosperous, middle-aged bankers, taking a quiet stroll with cigars preparatory to adjourning to the golf-links.

AS they expected, there were three people at the spot toward which they were advancing so casually—a lady very smartly got up in the spring seaside style, sitting on a big block of sandstone with a military-looking man in chessboard checks, and facing these two was a short, fat person in a cinnamon-hued, soft felt sombrero, fawn-colored clothes, and a fierce tie—evidently Mr. Walcher.

The representative of the South of England's Navy's Union seemed to have finished his business, for he jauntily pinched his hat at Echo, as the partners drew nearer, and hurried past, lighting a powerful cigar.

Chatting casually and apparently ignoring the couple on the sandstone, the Brass-Cumber combine strolled past, staring

seaward. For their part, Miss Paley and the gentleman Walcher had addressed as "Captain" seemed too interested in the rather brisk conversation they were carrying on to pay much attention to the two passers-by.

WHEN the partners returned from their stroll, the couple were gone.

The Honorable John stood and stared with a puzzled expression at the block of sandstone.

"What I can't make out is how Echo's got time to waste over a third share. There must be more in it than that," he said. "Echo is a girl that likes the lot."

"More than that!" replied the Colonel. "But don't forget there's a whole lot of money in the scheme—if we can get hold of Walcher—and if Walcher has got the influence with those shovel-pushers back at the works that he says he's got. Let's get over and have a look at 'em."

They moved away to the swarm that were working on the esplanade. There was a small crowd collecting at a spot where a little steam crane was hoisting big blocks of granite up to the level of the esplanade, and toward this crowd the two crooks proceeded. They saw that Mr. Walcher was the center of the group, and that he was talking loudly to a person who seemed to be a sort of foreman. It appeared that the foreman was straining the crane cable beyond its capacity—to the risk of the navvies working below.

"Yeh say it aint none of my business," shouted Honest Jim Walcher. "And I say it's the business of any 'uman bein' to protest on behalf of these honest toilers around me when I sees their lives being risked every minute of the day so as yeh can squeeze a few extra shillin's out of it for yer bloated capitalist employers. These honest workers whose union I 'ave the privilege to represent aint beasts of burden—no, nor no slaves, neither. They're 'uman flesh and blood, as good as any duke or any other of yer idle rich, and I demand their rights."

The foreman stood back, gladly making way for a smart, dapper man who had come up quickly—a keen-looking, hard-faced, capable sort of person, and evidently a manager or some one in authority. He went close up to the agitator.

"Now, get out of this," he said crisply. "The cable's tested up to a ton and a half more than she's lifting. I know you, and

I know what you're after. Now get out—or must I boot you out?"

"Men—comrades!" yelled Mr. Walcher. "This is threats and violence. Will yeh stand this, comrades?"

A low but rather ominous murmur broke out from the gang.

"Let 'im alone. . . . He aint done no harm. . . . Not so much 'boot'. . . . He's a man from the Union—only takin' care of our rights," they grumbled. The manager moderated his tone a little. Every minute was precious if the work was going to be finished according to the contract, and the one thing the contractors could not afford was any discontent on the part of the workmen—still less a strike.

"All right, men. We'll have the inspector over this afternoon and re-test the cable. How's that?"

"That's all I arsk," said Honest Jim, rather reluctantly, replying for the men, and slowly withdrew.

Messrs. Brass and Clumber followed him.

"We ought to make his acquaintance," said the Colonel. The Honorable John nodded, and they overtook the agitator.

"I should like to congratulate you, sir, on the fine and plucky stand you made on behalf of those workingmen," said the Colonel. "It was the act of a *man*—a brave man—and I admire it."

"And," chimed in Mr. Brass, "and we hope you'll join us in a bottle of wine up at the hotel to celebrate it."

Mr. Walcher, agreeably surprised and flattered, agreed with a swiftness that hinted at an expensive thirst, and the three started off toward the hotel.

HONEST JIM got on wonderfully well with his new acquaintances and their champagne. He put them down in his own mind as a pair of rather simple-minded toffs, and proceeded to deal with them as such. It was clear to him that they admired him tremendously, and the skillfully gross flattery they administered with the champagne he wolfed as hungrily as he did the wine. By the time he had finished the first quart, Honest Jim, vaguely striving to live up to the almost hopeless standard of power which the partners seemed to believe he possessed, had admitted that he fancied he could bring the two thousand or more workmen employed by Fairborn and Company out on strike any day he liked.

By the time the second quart had passed down, what the Honorable John described afterward as his "crater," he had become amazingly frank and confidential; and when, the third quart of wine being soaked up, Mr. Walcher quietly slid off his chair and pillowed his unbeautiful head upon the claw foot of the table, the partners knew as much about the scheme for squeezing good red money out of Fairborn and Company as Honest Jim himself.

It was quite simple—painfully so. It amused the partners tremendously. They laughed very heartily indeed at the ingenuity and simplicity of it all—laughter which, if heard in public, would cause most people with money on them to button up their pockets and take a cab home.

IT seemed briefly that Fairborn Senior, the grim old grindstone who had built up the big contracting business, was on a yachting cruise for his health, with strict medical orders to forget all business. His son Percival was temporarily in charge.

Now, Percival was a master of the theoretical technicalities of the building and contracting business, but beyond that was "easy." The scheme, allowing for the champagne kinks in Walcher's tongue, was roughly as follows:

First Walcher would "urge" five hundred pounds or so out of Fairborn and Company, as represented by Percival, with which to jolly the workmen along and keep them from striking.

Then the engagement of Walcher to Miss Paley—or the Baroness de Bonbleuton, English relict of a French nobleman, as she was thought to be by people who believed what they were told and what they read in the visitors' list of the local paper—would be announced, and a feast provided for the workmen by the Baroness to celebrate the occasion. This was the initial stage to making the Baroness extremely popular with the men—a step which she proposed to follow up indefinitely for a week or so. Then Honest Jim and Captain Fitzair, the brother of the Baroness (otherwise, as Mr. Brass had instantly recognized, "City Joe," one of the earliest crooks that London had ever produced) intended to "pinch" a week's wages from the clerk that brought them to the works' pay office from the bank. This being successfully carried out, Honest Jim would secretly bring about the strike he had been paid to avert. At the end of the

first week, he and Fitzair would grab the thousand-odd pounds strike-pay which would be brought to Harromouth by a representative of the Navvy's Union. On the same day the Baroness expected to get a check for anything from a hundred upward from Percival Fairborn upon guaranteeing that by using it in judicious bribery in the right place, she and her fiancé could get the men back to work at once: the word "*hundred*" on the check she proposed altering to "*thousand*," and adding a modest 'O' to the figure line, she would cash it and step from the curb outside the bank into the motor which, containing Walcher and Fitzair, and their accumulation of plunder, would be waiting to convey them out of Harromouth without delay.

That was the plan which the partners gradually pieced together from the "honest" blackguard's vinous incoherence, and there appeared to be nothing much wrong with it—from the crook's point of view.

THEY rang for Sing and indicated the fallen agitator to him.

"See that, Sing?" said the Honorable John, pointing to Walcher's body.

"Yes, master." The Chinaman's usually impassive air disappeared as his vulturine wits seized on the fact that his masters were once more on the trail.

"Soused," said Mr. Brass briefly. "Remove it. . . . Take care of him. Sober him up as soon as you can—by dinner-time at least."

"Yes, master." Sing bent down, lifted Mr. Walcher and carted him out to a bedroom which the partners, in view of such a contingency, had engaged for their guest.

Then they strolled across and took the furnished house which they had discussed—or rather, which an optimistic house-agent fancied he had let to them for the season, on the strength of a ten-pound note in advance and a few cubic feet of tall talk from the wealthy-looking pair.

This done, they returned to the hotel and sent for the manager and *chef*. Breakfast had been a failure; but that, as Mr. Brass remarked, had been the hotel's fault. If lunch was a failure, it would be their own fault.

"In a place this size we don't expect to have to bring our food or lend our own cook to the management," explained the Colonel, "but if you don't feel competent to turn out an eatable lunch for once in a

way, then say so, and the Chink can come down and do it."

But the management decided that a special effort should be made—and made it to the entire satisfaction of the partners.

On the other hand, Mr. Walcher's lunch was a barbarous broth composed and blended by Sing (an expert in pick-me-ups) containing among other things a large bottle of lukewarm soda water and a stiff three fingers of Worcester sauce. True, it knocked the agitator down before it picked him up—but desperate evils require desperate remedies, and whatever it tasted like, it tightened up the nerves of Mr. Walcher's body till he felt that at the least touch he would twang like a harp.

Then Sing escorted him in to Messrs. Brass and Clumber, who had just enjoyed their customary half-hour's nap after lunch, and who proceeded to parade the whole of his horrid past (of the previous four hours) before the dazed and pallid agitator's bloodshot vision.

"You gave the whole game away, Walcher; and as far as we can see," concluded Mr. Brass, "you're guilty of conspiracy with this faked baroness and imitation captain to commit fraud, forgery, theft, blackmail, assault and battery, and, in fact, every kind of crime there is. And now what we want to know is—what are you going to do about it?"

The "navvy's pal" tried to think—he realized that he had given himself away pretty thoroughly; but he decided that a head like a hornless phonograph playing military band records at full pressure was not the sort of thing to think with.

So he threw himself on the mercy of the two bland bandits who were waiting for their answer—and then they had him where they wanted him.

WHEN, two hours later, Mr. Walcher retired to his lodging, he went without uneasiness. Indeed, he was inclined to glow with a certain righteous enthusiasm. As he told himself, it is not every day that an agitator of his meager influence is called upon to assist two highly placed Government officials—secret service men—to balk a couple of adventurers who had been guilty of attempting to corrupt a respectable Trade Union representative with a view to putting the power of the said representative to base uses. Especially unusual was it that such officials should be

so broad-minded and generous as the parting speech of the smoother-spoken of the two hinted they would be.

"You've got to remember, Walcher," Mr. Brass had said, in his blandest style, "that we have not been sent down here to interfere with *you*. We know that you are all right if you are only left alone. The pair we are after are this Baroness and Captain Fitzair. They have played this sort of game all over England—and this time we want to get them red-handed. You needn't look nervous—we aren't detectives. *We* shall arrest nobody. We work behind the scenes. But what *we* say, Scotland Yard does. Understand? Home Office. Don't be afraid—we'll look after you. But you've got to help us get that couple red-handed. See?"

MR. WALCHER, rather pale but reassured by the friendly tone of these two "agents" from the Home Office, nodded nervously.

"Your instructions—from us direct—are to go ahead with your plans, but to do nothing without first consulting us. D'ye understand? Don't back out of any arrangement with the Baroness, but just keep us advised. See?"

Honest Jim saw.

"But couldn't yeh gimme a pass or a permit or something to show the police in case they happen to drop on us when we're doing the trick?" he asked.

The partners stared at each other.

"What do you think?" asked the Honorable John.

The Colonel answered to hesitate.

"I really doubt if Mr. Walcher is important enough to justify our issuing a protection pass to him," he said, very seriously. Mr. Walcher turned paler.

"In the ordinary way, I'd agree with you," said Mr. Brass. "But we've got to remember that—" He crossed over and began to speak in low tones to his partner. Walcher caught a few words—such as "labor unrest . . . military . . . Great Britain . . . Unions . . . Crisis"—And his spine went chilly as he realized (or thought he realized) that inadvertently he had collided with Great Forces. He watched the consultation anxiously. Eventually the Honorable John seemed to persuade the Colonel, who nodded reluctantly.

"Very well, I agree—I think perhaps we should be justified. I'll prepare it."

He went to a writing-table, and on a sheet of note-paper wrote a few words, signed it with a completely unintelligible scrawl, and added at the foot the words "*One month.*" Then he gave the sheet to Mr. Brass, who added a number and initial, and handed it on to Walcher, who read it, as follows:

Industrial Secret Service.

Bearer Immune.

A. 1

(Signature unintelligible)

One month.

From May 1st.

(Countersigned) A. 2.

Walcher folded the "pass" almost reverently.

"Merely show that to any detective or police inspector at any time you are in danger of arrest—but only at the last moment, and in private," said the Colonel, heavily. "Remember there are hundreds of men in this country who would murder you for that pass."

The agitator nodded respectfully and put the paper carefully away. Then he received his instructions and left.

The partners smiled at each other, and took a little refreshment.

"These half-honest crooks are as simple in the head as bull calves," said the Honorable John gayly, and looked at his watch. "It's about time you pulled out for Purdston."

THE COLONEL rose reluctantly, and rang for the car. Ten minutes later he was on his way to Purdston, while Mr. Brass went down to see how they were getting on at the works. The men seemed glum and sullen, and the foreman looked uneasy. While the Honorable John watched, a big navvy hammering at a spikehead missed it and struck his foot. He shouted an oath, dropped his hammer, and nursing the injured foot, yelled: "That's what we gets fifty-five bob a week for."

The Honorable John noted the unmasked approval with which the workmen who heard greeted the exclamation, and moved on.

"Ripe as red apples for a strike," he told himself. "They'd come out for next to nothing. Not that *we* shall be here to see it!"

Then, lighting a cigar with the air of a man who had done a good day's work, he went on to the furnished house—a new white-and-red detached villa standing

alone on the cliff not far from the valley—where Sing should be engaged in getting things ready for the partners' occupation that evening.

The Chink was there, working with his customary efficiency. He grinned at his owner-driver like an affectionate dog.

"Everything velly nice, master," he said.

"That's right, my lad," said Mr. Brass encouragingly. "You stick to your work, and I'll stick to you. You'd better lay dinner for three—Mr. Walcher will be coming. Dinner at nine—the Colonel wont be back till then. And don't leave anything lying about—see? When we leave this place, we shall leave *quick*. We shall probably hop it at a sixty-mile-an-hour clip—and there wont be time to go over the place with a fine-tooth comb. So leave nothing about. Have you brought the old brandy round from the hotel? You have? Then kindly fetch it along here, there's a good lad."

THE clock was chiming eleven that night, when the partners and Mr. Walcher finished their liqueurs and coffee and withdrew into the drawing-room.

"And now to business," said the Honorable John, eying the agitator severely.

"Yes sir." Since receiving his valuable immunity pass, Mr. Walcher had become astonishingly humble.

"Well, come on, then," repeated Mr. Brass impatiently. "To business—the check, my man, the check."

Mr. Walcher produced a check and deferentially handed it to the Honorable John, who scrutinized it and passed it to the Colonel. "Five hundred—dated to-day—payable to bearer—signed Fairborn and Company—No. K 290232," muttered the Colonel. "It seems in order." He touched a bell, and a burly person entered—a big, fleshy man with a heavy face and bloodshot eyes. He was dressed in the uniform of a police inspector. Few would have recognized in this overpoweringly official-looking person Mr. Ferdinand Bloom, butler and handy-man at Purdston. Mr. Walcher quailed as Ferdinand ran a light gray eye over him.

"Inspector!" snapped the Colonel. The "inspector" saluted smartly.

"Sir!"

"Kindly witness that this check is handed to us by Mr. Walcher, who has received it this afternoon—in confidence—from Messrs. Fairborn and Company—to

pay expenses Walcher is likely to incur in urging the workmen down at the new pier and esplanade *not* to strike."

"Yes, sir." The inspector examined the check and made an entry in his notebook.

"Good," continued the Colonel. "We have issued an immunity pass to Mr. Walcher—you understand?"

"Yes sir."

"You may go."

The "inspector" saluted and went—back to the kitchen to help Sing wash the dishes.

The partners turned to Walcher again, the Colonel folding the check and putting it in his note-case.

"Now, Walcher," said the Honorable John, "be *very* careful what you say—do you understand? Be very careful." His inanner was an admirable imitation of a prosecuting counsel. "Tell us exactly what the plans of this so-called baroness and imitation captain are for tomorrow."

Walcher, nervous but sustained by the recollection of his immunity pass, explained at some length. The partners listened attentively to the end, nodding reflectively.

"Very clever," said the Colonel finally in his harsh voice. "Ve-ry clever—clever enough to get the baroness and her captain ten years each. Now, clear out."

WALCHER cleared out, with a certain air of relief. The partners waited until the footsteps of the cowed free-lance agitator died out, and then they rang for Sing and Mr. Bloom, and spent the next half-hour in giving them *their* instructions.

They were good at most things, the Brass-Clumber partners; but what they most enjoyed and what they were best at was "giving instructions." They were no fonder of risk and work than the next man. They preferred to do the superintending and the organizing. At the end of the instructions, the Honorable John gave the other two a word of encouragement:

"Now you know what you have to do, my lads, and let's see how well you can do it. You needn't look so miserable, Bloom of Roses—you wont get pinched tomorrow. It's ten to one against your getting pinched. You want to brighten up and enter into the spirit of the thing—the way that yellow-looking little banana of a Sing does. Look at him—*he's* happy. You be happy too, and do your duty tomorrow. If you do your duty, you'll be happy. See what I mean? You can clear

out now and get on with your work. Be good lads and we'll take care of you—that's what."

He smiled affably and waved them away.

"What I like about us, Squire," he said, "is our neatness. *We* don't steal—hardly ever, I mean. We just hike off with stuff that has been stolen by some real first-hand thieves. And that's what I call neatness. Look at that five hundred. Walcher bullied that out of Fairborn and Company—by threatening 'em with a strike, the low hound. Yet he's glad to give it to us—you and me. Dying to hand it over. Neat—that's what I call it. Nothing but neatness."

BUT if the diverting to themselves of the Fairborn check was "neat," the next day's work was considerably neater.

At precisely ten minutes past ten on the following morning a middle-aged clerk of highly respectable appearance might have been seen walking along the cliff path carrying a weighty bag. With the sole exception of a smartly dressed lady who had alighted from a long olive-green fast-looking motor at the end of a new, and as yet unbuilt-upon road, and was strolling toward the low cliffs,—evidently an intending visitor taking a preliminary look at Harromouth,—the clerk was the only person to be seen on the cliff at that hour. It was too early in the season for promenaders, and in any case the fine drizzle that was falling did little to tempt stray strollers out.

Humming a cheerful tune to himself, the clerk with the heavy bag—which contained the wages of the men working on the esplanade—went down the steps by which the little water-worn valley was crossed, and stepping out buoyantly, was about to ascend the steps on the opposite side, when he heard a swift footfall behind him.

He half turned; and as he turned, his hat—a soft felt—was jammed down over his eyes, and before he was able to raise his hand, a thick sack was drawn down over his head, a rope ran round his chest outside the sack, effectually binding his arms, and he was neatly tripped. It was all done with a precision and dispatch that spoke of careful planning. And indeed, 'Captain' Fitzair had drilled Mr. Walcher very thoroughly in his part of the business, from the lying in wait behind a bend, to passing the rope round the clerk.

"That's got him," said the Captain hoarsely, knotting another rope round the legs of the man. "Where's his bag? Hey! Look out! Jump for it! Ceps!"

THE Captain leaped away, not stopping to pick up the bag which had fallen some feet off, and bounded up the steps, using hideous language. For a burly police inspector was hurrying into the valley from the beach end of it; and racing down from the other end of the gorge was a constable. The Captain and Walcher were caught between two fires. Their only hope of escape was up the steps which the Captain, as he topped them, saw, with a wild hope in his heart, were not yet guarded. He heard the sound of a struggle behind him as the police seized Walcher, and he flew toward the olive-green motor, in which the lady who looked like an intending visitor was already seated. Evidently she was a confederate, for as the Captain ran toward her, she backed the motor to him. Within three seconds he was in the car, the woman had roared up her engine, dropped in the clutch with a brutal jar that sent the road dirt flying from under the steel-studded back wheels, changed into top speed and was shooting away down the lonely new road. Even so she was only just in time, for a white car, furiously driven, came racing out of another road, swung around the corner and tore after the olive-green car. The second motor was occupied by two men in peaked caps—like the caps of police inspectors.

The woman in the fugitive car glanced behind her.

"What is it?" she snapped.

"Sixty-horse Kite—looks like," gasped the Captain. Echo Paley laughed—an acid, biting laugh.

"We can lose 'em," she snapped, and steered out onto the main London Road.

BUT it was not until an hour later that she finally shook off the pursuit—some thirty-five miles northeast of Harromouth. And she never knew that if Mr. Brass and Colonel Clumber, the peak-capped occupants of the white car, had wished it, they could have overhauled her at almost any moment they liked. But they only wanted to frighten the couple away from the loot—the last thing in the world they desired to do was to come up with Miss Paley and her "captain."

Meantime Mr. Ferdinand Bloom and the invaluable Sing, back in the valley, had taken possession of the bag, slipped on the long mackintoshes which hid their police uniforms, changed their hats, and left the valley by the upper end. Mr. Walcher had made himself scarce in the same direction in obedience to "Inspector" Bloom's curt order to that effect, given him the instant Captain Fitzair disappeared up the steps.

The two quickly made their way to the furnished house taken "for one night only" by the Honorable John, where the big high-powered limousine car of the partners was waiting, already packed; and ten minutes later, Sing at the wheel, they were sliding smoothly and tranquilly out of Harromouth "forever and for aye," as the song-writer so feelingly observed. . . .

That evening Sing, duly arrived at Purdston, handed over the bag to Messrs. Brass and Clumber, who had reached home early in the afternoon.

It contained just over three thousand pounds—mainly in treasury notes—with some silver.

The Honorable John surveyed the big pile of money thoughtfully.

"Fair," he said, "very fair. Not a fortune, but fair."

He slid a note toward Sing and one toward Bloom.

"Here you are, my lads. Take your share. You've been very good lads, and although we don't intend to spoil you, at the same time we don't grudge a sweetener for you. Now, hook it and see about dinner."

The pair pensively hooked it, and the Honorable John turned to his partner.

"Wonder what happened to Honest Jim?" he said.

The Colonel remarked that he did not know—nor, he added, did he care. Which was correct.

"About three thousand five hundred, counting the check I cashed this morning," said Mr. Brass thoughtfully. "Not bad for holiday money—but I'm not sure it wouldn't have paid us to wait. If we'd waited, we might have got the lot when Echo had carried out her plans."

The Colonel eyed his regretful partner sternly.

"HOW should we have separated Echo from all that money?" he asked. "Even supposing she and Fitzair had pulled it off! It was too risky. After all, three thousand-odd in hand is worth five thousand-odd in Echo's hooks. Yes sir. But you were always a bit of a human wolf, old man," he added amiably.

"Who—me? Me a wolf?" said the Honorable John quickly, looking a little shocked. "Not me—I'm no wolf. I only ask for my own."

"Well, you've got it, haven't you?" replied the Colonel sarcastically.

Mr. Brass gave up the argument.

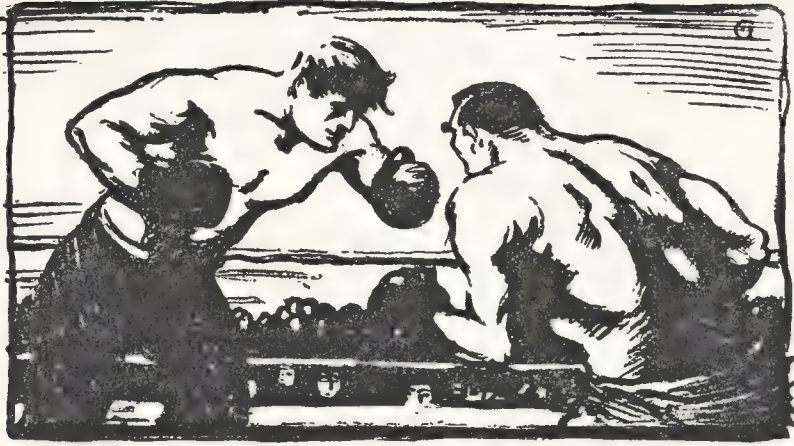
"Well, some of it, perhaps," he confessed reluctantly.

Then as he reached for the whisky, he laughed.

"I suppose you're right, Squire," he said. "It doesn't do to be greedy. It's a mistake. I shouldn't like to get greedy. . . . Say when."

The siphon hissed. The Colonel said "when," and they settled down to enjoy a quiet hour before dinner.

"TRAILERS OF THE TUSK," a new and even more felicitous chapter in the quaint chronicles of these two companions in crime, will be narrated by the ingenious Bertram Atkey in the next, the February, issue. With it will appear a thrilling novelette by Calvin Johnson called "The Perfect Stranger," at least a baker's dozen of other memorable stories by such writers as Clarence Herbert New, Warren Hastings Miller, Calvin Ball, William Byron Mowery, John Mersereau, Jay Lucas and Beatrice Grimshaw—and five of the most remarkable stories of Real Experience that we have thus far published.



The Mascot

The man who wrote "Paul Revere's Bride," "The Park Sparrow" and "The Wild Bull of the Campus" here gives us a characteristically spirited tale of the box-fighting game.

By JACK CASEY

EDDIE Gills is a bald-headed little shrimp who chews on big cigars and always has a dead one tilted up near his nose. Mr. Gills maintains that, next to the steel trust and Mr. Ford's place in Detroit, a heavyweight champion pays the best returns in the world.

If you happen into a pool- and billiard-parlor in almost any part of the United States you will find prominently displayed a poster wherein Eddie Gills solicits the wide world to uncover him an ardent young ring musketeer of brawn and talent that he may develop him into a champion. Eddie flooded the country with those posters. On them is a photograph of himself and a champion he made, but for somebody else, a mistake he has never ceased to mourn.

The mail Eddie got in the first heat of the hanging of his posters prompted a Long Island postmaster to wire Washington for secret-service help, believing Eddie had unloosed a new flimflam game on a public always eager to give up. But about the time Billy Blainey was leaving Great Neck for his annual winter sojourn to Cuba the possibilities of a find had simmered down to

few, one of them, according to a fervid letter, in far off Key West.

"I change there to get the boat to Havana," said Blainey, who had dropped in to Gills Arbor, L. I., to bid the proprietor *adios*. Gills' elaborate fight camp facing the water was his hangout. "Who's the prospect? I'll look him over."

"Joe Lopez is his name," said Gills, picking up a letter from his desk. "Let's see, he's only nineteen and according to the dope here is Young Kid Coming himself, and—this is a good break, Billy—he's fighting the Army post champion down there on the nineteenth. What date's this?"

"Sixteenth," replied Blainey. "I'll make it; I'm leaving tonight. Gimme the letter."

He stuffed it into a pocket to read on the train.

"It's from some cigar-maker," said Gills. "If you can yes him out of some smokes, ship 'em up. My last cigar bill set me back plenty."

THREE days later Blainey was in the office of a cigar factory on Key West's south shore overlooking the Gulf Stream.

Opposite him sat Señor Victor Diaz, a fat little Cuban with black eyes and martial mustachios. The Cuban possessed an excellent English vocabulary, three cigar factories, the Fourth of July Café,—a combination pool-room and restaurant in the Cuban quarter,—one of the finest residences in the city, and last but by no means least a convent-bred daughter whose beautiful olive face ordained the gilt bands of the best perfecto he manufactured, a twenty-five-cent clear Havana called El Mio, which means My Own. It was for her he was concerned and for her sake he had acted, he said, after Eddie Gills' poster had reached him through the mails at the Fourth of July Café.

Joe Lopez was a sponger, the Señor informed Mr. Blainey, after both had lighted El Mios and Mr. Blainey had broken out in a rash of enthusiasm over the beauty of the cigar-man's daughter, an enlarged photograph of whom hung on the office wall.

"I get you," said Blainey. "New York's full of them. Bums. Wont work. Live off anybody they can."

"No, no." The Señor shook his head so vigorously his pink jowls wobbled. "Señor Lopez is a sponge fisherman," he said. "Fishes for sponges. We have a big sponge industry here in Key West."

"I see," said Blainey, "and on the side he fights."

"With great success," said the Señor. "In fact, with too much success. Among our people here he has become almost as important as a saint. By and by if it continues the pressure of sentiment concerning his importance may unbalance my daughter to the point of defying the wishes of her mother and me and eloping with this—"

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" Billy Blainey whistled. "The plot unravels," he cried, leaning forward. "Lopez loves your daughter and you—"

"—have forbidden her to speak to him or have aught to do with him," the little fat man said, thumping his desk with a pudgy fist, "—and him likewise, but every night he defies me by playing his guitar and singing under her window. I have threatened to shoot him but he laughs at me. I have asked the police to eject him, but they like him and merely shrug their shoulders. I dare not do anything desperate because he is so well liked due to his success in the prize-ring here. I am afraid our people would make life miserable for me. Still, my daughter—"

"—is nuts about him," nodded Blainey, understandingly.

"Her mother or a duenna must watch her continually," cried Señor Diaz. "She is fascinated with the boy!"

"They always are," said Blainey sagely, "when you don't want 'em to be."

The little fat man nodded and smoked his cigar aglow.

"WHEN I read Mr. Gills' poster," he continued, "I saw a way out of the difficulty. It occurred to me that if Mr. Gills found in young Lopez a prospect worth developing, his absence from the city would break up this foolish attachment my daughter has for him. Naturally, I have higher hopes for my daughter than a sponge fisherman. I want her to marry wealth, if possible."

"Well, of course, that end of it is your funeral," said Blainey. "How well can Lopez fight? That's all I'm interested in. Unless he's pretty good, Eddie Gills wont want to bother with him."

"Not even if I made it worth his while?" asked the Cuban, eyebrows arched.

"You couldn't," said Blainey bluntly. "Eddie Gills is gambling for big dough. If he develops a champion, he'll make enough in a couple of years to buy a dozen cigar factories like this. As for second or third raters, he isn't interested."

"The champions they—er—make what you call big dough, eh?" asked Señor Diaz, licking his lips greedily.

"I know two that are millionaires and neither's been champ more than six years," replied Blainey.

"In that event," said the Señor thoughtfully, "if Joe Lopez became a champion he wouldn't—"

"—be a bad match for your daughter." Blainey grimly spoke the Señor's thoughts for him as he stood up. Then he added, smiling contemptuously, "—but he'll be a dumb-bell if he ever comes to a shrimp like you and asks for her. Up North," he resumed, putting on his hat and moving toward the door, "you're what we call a sure-thing guy. You play both ends from the middle. You have no objections to this boy personally, just want to give him the air because he's poor. But once let him get money and you'll be telling the world what a great guy he is and how you always said he'd make good. Bah!" Blainey snorted and stamped out, slamming the office door after him.

JOE LOPEZ lived alone in a tiny shack on the shore of a lagoon used by fishermen and owners of pleasure craft for an anchorage, and here at sundown Billy Blainey got his first glimpse of the young fighter. He had gone to the shack to learn that Lopez had been away sponging for several days, but was due to return because of the evening's engagement in the prize-ring.

Beneath a tiny drawbridge of the Overseas Railroad, the lagoon emptied into the Gulf Stream. Boats at anchor and several rotting and half-submerged hulls near shore were reflected in its placid depths, as well as a gorgeous pattern of low-hanging pink and white clouds, seeming like huge conch shells, floating seaward. As the sun dipped to rest beyond the drawbridge its reflection grew less bright and more mellow until gradually it turned to a pink as soft as flesh-colored chiffon. Along a carpet of this from the bridge to the shore there came, as Billy Blainey watched, a stalwart youth, barefooted and mighty-armed, who stood astern and with a long pole gracefully propelled a dory after the manner of Venetians. He was singing softly in Spanish, while motionless on his left shoulder was perched a huge parrot, red of breast and green of wing, with a head of crimson and orange. They came to a stop not ten feet from where the New Yorker looked on. The youth caught the painter of a skiff and made fast his dory. Then as the sun dropped from sight, bequeathing the heavens a legacy of riotous tints, he squatted down on his heels and, removing his broad-brimmed conical straw hat, washed in the water one at a time and tossed into the skiff his catch of sponges. One, two, three, four, a dozen were washed and dropped when suddenly Billy Blainey heard the parrot call out, not in a shrill raucous cry as parrots will but in a peremptory tone amazingly natural:

"Throw in the sponge, Joe!"

It was unbelievably human. Had it been spoken anywhere but where parrots are common as pets,—he had seen hundreds in Key West and in Cuba,—Billy Blainey would have challenged his hearing. The parrot talked further, a jabbering of talk, but in Spanish. The boy cleaned his catch, straightened and poled ashore.

Five minutes later, through an old fisherman interpreter,—Lopez spoke little English, following the custom of many Cubans to adhere strictly to their mother tongue,

—Billy Blainey temporarily forgot his mission, to ask eagerly of sponges and the parrot. What, for instance, could pretty Polly say besides what he had heard—and why a bird while sponging?

The old Cuban replied after many chuckles and an exchange of Spanish with Joe Lopez:

"Joe say heem and parrot together all time for five year. She only talk heem two t'ings in Ainglish. What you hear and 'Pretty Polly.' She pick that up from little 'Merican gal pass house to school, the other at the docks where we sell our sponges. Men say 'Throw in the sponge'—to be weighed. Parrot hear 'em tell Joe and get wise, savvy?"

Billy Blainey did and, laughing, eyed Joe Lopez curiously. He found him as handsome as he appeared modest and likable. He was brawny and colorful with his pet parrot but he wondered how well he could fight. It would almost be a miracle if he possessed enough boxing promise to warrant Eddie Gills' attention. Promising fighters were scarce. If they weren't, Eddie Gills, a prominent figure in the cauliflower industry, would not have found it necessary to flood a country with handbills hunting one. As he left the fighter, he found himself hoping Joe Lopez's star would ascend if for no other reason than to twinkle to the discomfort of Señor Diaz.

BUT Billy Blainey was totally unprepared for the discovery he made that night at the boxing bouts on the parade grounds at the Army post, and he experienced the same emotions a miner does when he happens on gold. Joe Lopez, he discovered, possessed what was to make him the biggest drawing card in the country overnight—what in but eight months led to his being built up to fight the light heavyweight champion of the world with a guarantee that would have made his prospective father-in-law's head whirl. It was not ability to fight, however. Not even a Terry McGovern whirlwind tenacity and bulldoggedness would have created the sensation Joe Lopez did on his first appearance in Madison Square Garden to face a set-up. Lopez possessed little pugilistically to warrant his being matched to fight a champion. But he had what prompted promoters to leap with joy. Billy Blainey stared the first time he spotted Joe Lopez headed ringward, then leaped to a telegraph office, wired Eddie Gills and promptly hustled the fighter

North. What Lopez possessed was a mascot, when he fought—and the mascot was his parrot.

Which even so may not strike you as so extraordinary as to be extravagantly likened to a gold mine, until you analyze. What Joe Lopez particularly possessed was the parrot's undying love and the habit of wearing her perched on his shoulder into the prize-ring. From the moment he started fighting until the fight ended she looked on from a perch on the uppermost ring-rope not far from his corner.

The sight of this handsome youth, black-eyed, black-haired and swarthy in brilliant vermilion trunks, moving ringward with this gaudy tropical pet perched on a shoulder gazing down so calmly and serenely on a bedlam of greeting was, Broadway said, "One for the book." Broadway reacted to it with fervor which is synonymous for saying the country did—for in pugilism the country apes Broadway. From the 'eighties and 'nineties that flow into West End Avenue and the Drive on the West over to customers from the Gas House district on the East the verdict was unanimous that Joe Lopez was a sensation. In reality the sensation was the novelty of a parrot mascotting a fighter. That Joe Lopez fought three times in five weeks and no opponent stayed more than four rounds was incidental if analyzed, which it was not except by promoters and Eddie Gills. Opponents were selected with care that they would *not* last, promoters already visualizing what Lopez would draw when pitted against the champion. If he was led up gradually and fighters known as tough spots avoided, a championship match was easy. A little ballyhooing and the trick would be accomplished.

Fight fans do no analyzing. They are putty in the hands of the gentlemen who have established pugilism among the country's Big Businesses. Because of that trait in humans which prompts one to give to a beggar because of his poodle or patronize a gypsy because her pet canaries look cute dropping worthless prognostications on tiny cards into one's hand, Joe Lopez with his parrot was swept up on a wave of popularity. Fans implored him to win every time he started, then cheered him to victory—never stopping to analyze the reason. When Billy Blainey at the right moment furnished newspapers the story of the young Cuban's fight to wed a rich man's daughter he became overnight to the ro-

mantic of the species a battling Valentino and the women, too, became patrons and stormed arenas to see him mill.

THUS Joe Lopez was "made." Eight months from the time he came North with Billy Blainey he was matched to battle "Dutch" Fritz for the title—much to the delight of that brawny gentleman who needed a windfall badly and relished what is known as a "soft spot."

The Dutchman liked soft spots. He had become financially well off by evading tough opposition and selecting opponents to his liking. And this led to his being credited with one of those well-known streaks the color of an egg yolk. When the Lopez match was tendered him he regarded it as manna from Heaven. A falling market was squeezing him tight and yelling for margin. When promoters said, "You risk your title, of course," the champion laughed and replied:

"Youse guys don't have to sell this guy to me like you're doin' to the public, so don't make me laugh. Risk and Joe Lopez is applesauce."

The day after the match was made public Eddie Gills received the following telegram from Señor Victor Diaz, copies of which were rushed to the newspapers:

If Joe Lopez wins the championship the hand of my daughter is his.

That telegram cost Eddie Gills only eighty cents—it was sent collect—but the promoters put its value at \$100,000 for that's how many tickets they figured it sold for them the day following its publication.

It had other effects. For instance, it saddened Joe Lopez because its terms seemed as impossible of fulfillment as going after the moon, while on the other hand it amused "Dutch" Fritz hugely.

"Say," he said, "if that link o' sausage waits for the championship to get that moll she's going to die an old maid. He couldn't whip cream!"

Through what fight managers regard an ethical practice—that of paying an attendant in a rival's camp to spy out information—the remark reached Billy Blainey and Gills.

"'Dutch' aint so far off at that," Gills remarked as his paid informer replaced a yegg's cap and vanished off the porch at Gills Arbor where the men sat looking out on moon-lit Long Island Sound. "I only wish Joe could fight. Say, with this baby

champion the way the fans have gone cuckoo over him I'd make a million dollars. He gets more mash notes than the Prince o' Wales."

"Was there a chance of his developing if you had taken more time and not pushed him?" asked Blainey.

"A slim one," Gills replied. He chewed on his dead cigar and patted his bald head, a habit which in him denoted thought.

"A slim one," he repeated, "and always facing odds that some gim you figured for a setup would prove poison and knock your budding champ' into oblivion. Trouble with Joe is, he's a gentleman by instinct and only fights when his Latin temperament is churned to anger. Cooled, he eases down. With his girl figuring in this fight he ought to make the best showing he's ever made but it won't be good enough to beat the 'Dutchman,' I think."

"Fritz isn't so tough," said Blainey.

"No, 'Dutch' at heart is a great big quitter, but he's been lucky," said Gills. "He got a great break when he fought Grogan who was champ' before him. Grogan was slipping and doing what 'Dutch' has done ever since he grabbed the title—ducking the tough spots. Grogan took on Fritz, thinking him a pushover and 'Dutch' polished him off. If Joe was a better fighter such a thing could happen again but he isn't good enough. If it wasn't for the parrot Joe couldn't do better than a semi-final in this town, let alone battling for a championship."

ON the porch above the fighter sat with guitar in his lap and parrot on shoulder. He was strumming a love song which he accompanied softly in Spanish. The camp cook, his interpreter, had gone to the movies, so Joe Lopez had understood nothing of the conversation below. Even if he had been able to understand it is doubtful if the conversation would have penetrated his thoughts of far-off Key West and a girl who resembled a Madonna.

If he could only win the championship!

If he lost he would return home anyway but his task as pertained to the girl would be wellnigh hopeless. Cuban girls are loath to defy parents. As with the Spaniards they are wooed slowly and formally in the old world manner.

Came finally the end of the grind of training and the day of the fight. In the quiet of a suite in a Manhattan hotel out of earshot of the clamor of the mob bound

for the daylight battle, Joe Lopez sat lonesomely petting his parrot, his thoughts on sponges and the Florida Keys.

"Sometimes," he said through his interpreter and as if the parrot had shared his thoughts, "—I think she will be glad to be around sponge and water again."

He eyed the parrot.

"She will be today," said Gills, pulling out his watch. "In three hours we'll be in the ring."

THE champion was first to appear, a husky towhead moving ponderously through an aisle in the madhouse which the vast circular wooden amphitheater jammed with gore-hungry fight fanatics represented. He was flanked by a police guard with drawn clubs led by a fat pompous captain. At ringside the guard faded as the champion crawled through the ropes into the ring and took, with numerous bows and handclaps, a wholesale order of what some fighters interpret as acclamation—others, "applesauce." Over in a corner little Joe Abrams, his manager, with four attendants made ready the water-bucket with its bottles and sponge and tested the patented seat introduced to supplant the primitive stool. Meanwhile a promoter known for getting his principals into the ring on schedule time was knocking at a dressing-room door under the north section of stands and yelling "All ready" to Eddie Gills. As Gills stepped out of the dressing-room with his fighter and seconds, the youth with the yegg's cap of many hues slipped past the waiting police guard. He tugged Eddie Gills' coat, then when that gentleman stooped down whispered through cupped hands into his left ear. Then he vanished. Gills motioned Blainey back.

He said: "The champ's left hand is on the blink. Hurt it two days ago playing handball. Wanted to postpone the mill but he's too hard up for the dough."

"Huh," said Blainey, brightening up, "the kid's got a chance then."

Gills nodded and signaled the captain. The procession moved toward the arena, the captain with banty rooster strides, Lopez with his gaudy pet on a shoulder, Blainey, Gills and seconds with pail and towels bringing up in the rear. There was no mistaking the greeting awarded to Joe Lopez. It lasted from the second of his appearance until long after he had negotiated an aisle and was in the ring bowing over and over, one taped hand pointing

toward the parrot on the top rope, his teeth flashing white in a smile of pleasure that his pet should be beloved by others. At the insistence of the mob's cries (translated by the camp cook, now enrolled to swing a towel) he raised the gaudy mascot on his two hands and commanded it to roll over which it promptly did. There was a dignified sincerity in the young fighter's desire to please this vast audience so friendly and enthusiastic. He forgot the task at hand for the moment and was innocent that his apparent indifference and tremendous popularity were proving disconcerting to the champion and his little manager.

"To hell with the grandstand stuff—let's fight," growled the champion sourly.

"Yuh wont be able to hold up a canary let alone that spick rooster when the champ gets through wid yuh," said a second.

"What the heck is it, a pigeon-meet or a prize-fight?" demanded Joe Abrams.

All of which was over Joe Lopez' head but amusing to Eddie Gills and Blainey.

"This kid's cool all right," muttered a veteran sports writer at ringside. "For a boy fighting for not only a title and all the jack that goes with it but a gal as well he's twin to an ice-house."

"Oh, that girl stuff is bunk," opined a hard-boiled writer next to him. "That was part of the buildup for the fight."

"The hell it was," yelled a belligerent editor. "Did you see our last edition?"

He held up a copy of an evening paper, the front page of which shrieked:

**FIGHTER'S SWEETHEART AND FAMILY
GUESTS OF *EVENING SPHERE*
AT FIGHT TODAY**

Arrived Secretly From Key West This Morning
Accompanied by *Sphere's* Florida
Correspondent.

A subhead over a "special" story read:

**WILL WED TOMORROW IF JOE WINS
CHAMPIONSHIP**

Carmine Diaz Tells Myrtle Brown Of Her
Love For Lopez.
By Myrtle Brown, etc.

There were pictures depicting the party's arrival, also a "close-up" of the cigar-man's beautiful daughter.

"Does Lopez know the dame's here?" somebody asked.

The editor shook his head. "Wont know till after the fight. We wanted a picture of her wishing him luck but Eddie Gills wouldn't hear of it. Lopez thinks she's home."

The referee, immaculate in white linen and flannels, climbed into the ring. Joe Lopez put the parrot on the ring-rope and with the interpreter at his side listened to instructions in the center of the ring after which he posed for photographs facing Fritz. The champion tried hard to look severe but broke into a smile as he visualized how his stock with the public would soar when he revealed after the fight how, with but one good hand, he had risked his title rather than disappoint the public. Bunk, of course, but it would read well—better than admitting that the challenger was a pushover and the exchequer shy! Followed elaborate introductions, the necessity for which is one of the mysteries Sherlock Holmes has cunningly evaded solving, and the fight was on.

IT STARTED with a rush that carried every man and woman in the big pine bowl out of their seats onto their feet. Joe Lopez made it a rush fight because he had been told it was his only chance to win. The towheaded champion rushed things because it was good business to push over a pushover as quickly as possible—ending any possibility of their proving troublesome. Joe Lopez touched the parrot with a gloved hand for luck as the bell rang, then leaped to the fray as the crowd leaned forward tense. He had been told to disregard the champion's left hand entirely and watch only the right. Lithe and handsome, the boy from Key West—burnt brown from Gulf Stream heat and salt-laden breezes—appeared black in contrast to the blond giant he faced.

They locked bodies with a thud in the center of the ring, then suddenly Joe Lopez wrenched himself free and, almost too quick for the eye to follow, pumped his right hand three times at the champion's jaw. He missed his target, the button of the chin, but split a lip, raised a lump on the champion's left cheek-bone and made his nose feel as if it had suddenly blossomed into a cabbage. Angered, Fritz lashed out his right hand and Lopez ducked. They clinched; broke again and mixed in the center of the ring, a flurry of thudding punches bringing blood from both men and forcing the champion to break ground. A wild right swing sent him against the ropes, causing the parrot to squawk and put a post between herself and the big body which snapped the rope back taut. The crowd laughed, then ex-

changed excited comment at the fast pace. As the rope rebounded Joe Lopez, timing his punch perfectly, stepped inside the champion's right hand and let fly both his own, one to jaw, the other to midriff. Fritz grunted surprisedly and clinched. In the press row an old-timer yelled: "This kid looks like a champion."

This remark caused Gills and Blainey to smile so broadly they seemed to illuminate the corner they crouched in. It isn't difficult to look like a champion against a one-handed fighter especially, and this is what counts psychologically, when you know he is one-handed. Fritz to all appearances had the use of both hands but in clinches when the Cuban cleverly locked his one good hand he was helpless and was butchered with slashing jolts to the head and body that hurt. His lips were swollen, his nose a sight and what hurt more than all else, was the knowledge that he had brought it all on himself and now was in for what else was coming. His sore wrist was beginning to ache and he puffed from the fast pace the challenger was setting; not forgetting to curse that he had not trained more faithfully. Not that he anticipated by the remotest margin that the man before him could ever knock him out,—he would prove too cagey for that,—but if he kept up the pace there was danger in a decision against him even if he was champion and as such did not have to be the aggressor. But worst of all was the messy matinee that lay ahead of him. To be semi-helpless before a well-trained young man with enough punching power to split skin and bruise flesh every time his padded fists landed was too much like being the goat for a Roman holiday. In fact, it was much like being tossed to a lion. Wouldn't the round ever end?

"Who the hell broadcast this guy as a setup?" he gasped, semi-prostrate on the stool in his corner between rounds as little Joe Abrams sponged his face; "—a helluva setup he is."

"At's all right," soothed the little manager, who was well out of the range of punch fire when the execution was going on, "yuh aint even hurt yet."

"The hell I aint!" groaned the champion.

OVER on a neutral padded post was perched the parrot with an Old-World look in her eyes as she inventoried pro-

ceedings. It seemed a puzzled look as she eyed the busy little manager with the big fat sponge. What a strange place to find a sponge, that look seemed to say.

In the Lopez corner two men, among four working feverishly over the winded fighter, talked animatedly above the noise of the audience and ringsiders.

"I tell yuh, Billy, he can't last," said Eddie Gills. "It's now or never. I trained him for a five-round fight figuring his only chance was to make it a whirlwind go and cop or lose with the chances he'd lose. If he can't take the big cheese now he'll never win by points because in four more rounds at this pace he'll be burnt out and the Dutchman will outgeneral him with one hand, may even put him away."

The little trainer chewed his cigar viciously.

Billy Blainey looked worried. "Yuh know best, Eddie," he said, "but, suffering cripes!—it's a tough spot. If he could only go the distance he'd win a mile!"

"But he wont, Billy—he can't. It's too long and he aint trained for it. Who the heck ever thought this big gim would dare come into the ring with a bum hand?"

The bell rang for the second round.

"Go get him!" screamed Gills, piling out of the ring and motioning the commands to his fighter.

Joe Lopez charged out to meet the champion coming forward reluctantly with little stomach for what lay ahead, while the parrot with a scramble of Spanish watched Joe Abrams drop from the champion's corner and toss the big sponge into the water bucket.

SOCK! Sock! Sock! Again the blood spurted from Dutch's nose and mouth and, clinching, he turned and looked murder down at Joe Abrams and the laundry wielders who had unanimously prophesied the Cuban challenger a pushover for Fritz. Abrams made signals with his right hand, his thumb pointed significantly toward his own eye but the champion with a doleful look turned away. Once again he felt his only useful arm locked and the load of dynamite he clung to pumping a sledge-hammer into his midriff. Suddenly a fist shot up, snapping back his head. In the breakaway as the referee, his white shirt blood-smeared, slipped between them, Fritz let fly his right hand and spun young Lopez clear around, the blow landing high on his head. The

Cuban fell to one knee and took a short count as the mob arose with a frenzied scream at the sudden turn of the tide.

The champion leaned forward, his legs apart and his breath wheezing through bloodied mouth and nostrils, as he gazed at his foe. Maybe he wouldn't come so fast after this—but even as the thought matured the boy got up and came at him, a windmill of flying fists. Leaping inside a sluggish right-hand swing he pumped a gunfire of lefts on the champion's unprotected head. They seemed as staccato-like as machine-gun fire, when suddenly there was the snap of bone and Joe Lopez clinched desperately, agony written on his contorted face. The sound was not heard ten feet from the ring, so terrific was the roar of the mob but Eddie Gills got it and groaned aloud.

"Busted!" he cried with a catch in his voice.

Billy Blainey nodded dumbly.

The bell rang.

"Want to quit?" the little trainer asked Joe Lopez through the interpreter as the fighter sat in agony astride the stool with Gills and Blainey screening him from the corner opposite to hide evidence of the damage.

The question translated brought a flame to the fighter's cheeks, pale from pain, and tears brimmed to his eyes. His lips quivered as he snarled the answer.

"He say," said the little cook, "that when he's dead he quit."

Eddie Gills gripped the glove on the good hand in reply.

"It aint in the books for him to win, Billy, but don't you love 'em game? . . . Lord, boy, go to it."

JOE LOPEZ charged again as the bell rang, his good hand before him, the other helpless at his side. He charged as the parrot slipped along the uppermost rope toward the corner where Joe Abrams now scrambled to a crouch, the big sponge soggy with water clutched in his hand. The champ' was cut up and winded. If he happened to go down he would squeeze the sponge and toss the water upon him. Many a fallen battler has been so revived. The champion went down even as the little manager contemplated how he would succor him; went down as Joe Lopez fired his one good fist in a sweep from the floor and it landed on the side of the big blond's head. He wasn't out; was merely

dazed and down on his haunches where he rolled his head to dispel a light fog; then decided to take a count and rest. The audience watched breathlessly as the referee waving a hand ticked off the count.

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ."

Fritz lumbered to his feet and Joe Abrams sneaked over a spray of water from the sponge. The champion backed up and as Joe Lopez leaped toward him, lashed out his big right paw and the Cuban went reeling back, his lips mashed and bloody. He came forward again and they faced each other, primitive savages, each with a good hand, each with one crippled at his side. Joe Lopez had nothing now with which to lock that paw of Fritz's while he jolted him with uppercuts. It was now punch and break away, luck with the man who beat the other to the blow. They hurled themselves at each other and smacked simultaneously—to rebound, dripping from fresh cuts. Both were half groggy. Momentarily, the champion leaned against the ropes near his corner, almost dislodging the parrot as he awaited a fresh attack. Below him, trembling, crouched Joe Abrams, his furtive face set, one hand gripping the fluffy sponge he had neglected to re-wet.

Joe Lopez staggered forward and literally threw his right hand at the wavering champion. The other sidestepped but, befuddled, stepped into the punch instead of away from it. The impact was soggy. Blood and water spurted and Fritz, throwing out his hand, slipped to his knees as the challenger backed away. The din of the crowd came to that sudden hush that seems more penetrating than noise as the referee bent to count. The champion's back was to his corner. He was bent forward. In a ring sense he was unhurt but, wise in ring lore, he meant to utilize every precious restful second to regain strength and courage. Before him stood his weak and gory opponent, puffing with labored breath. Another round or two and he would be done for.

BEHIND the champion Joe Abrams bent forward, his eyes visible just above the flooring of the ring, his lips moving as if in silent supplication. He had a feeling that "this big bum" he had managed into a championship was preparing himself to quit. Or was he really hurt? He had had a yellow streak and once you have one it

is never disposed of permanently. And today when this Cuban had proved a tough egg instead of a pushover Fritz had been yelling between rounds worse'n a stuck pig!

Joe Abrams felt that he was in a tough spot. Sweat began to bead his forehead. If the champ' was really hurt, he ought to act. He looked all in. Or did he? Was he fakin', readying himself to take a run-out powder? Abrams stood silent, a little, befuddled question mark, the big fluffy sponge clutched in both hands.

Directly above him peering down fascinatedly from the ring-rope, perched the parrot.

Eternity seemed to pass for little Joe Abrams as the referee, his long right arm rising and falling, ticked off the count.

"One two three four five. . . ."

And with it clicked Abrams' mind. Was "Dutch" hurt? Or was he goin' to—

Out of the murk came the answer to his thoughts:

"Throw in the sponge, Joe!"

Joe Abrams' hands impulsively shot out and the sponge went bounding into the ring.

The referee with a single leap reached Joe Lopez' side and hurriedly raised the good hand of that astounded fighter.

"The big bum quit!" yelled a newspaper man. Yelled it as the amphitheater filled with a bedlam of noise. An astounded audience had just awakened to that drama of dramas, the passing of a champion!

Joe Abrams leaped into the ring as Eddie Fritz bounded to his feet with a snort of rage.

"What the hell— What happened?"

"What happened, yuh big bum?" cried the little manager, tears streaming down his face. "Yuh quit, that's all. Yuh quit."

"I quit?" yelled Fritz, "I quit? You're crazy! I was takin' a rest. I'm all right."

"All but your yellin' streak," wept Abrams. "Nobody but a hound like yuh would yell for the sponge."

"I didn't yell for no sponge! I didn't say nothin', yuh little runt!" cried Fritz. "We been jobbed! Somebody's jobbed us outa the title. Hey, referee! Oh, referee! Hey, Jimmy!" He ran to the referee and grabbed him by an arm. "We been jobbed outa the title, Jimmy! I didn't order no laundry!"

The referee waved it all off wearily. "Tell it to the commission," he said.

"What are yuh tryin' to do, yuh big bum—make me believe I didn't hear yuh myself?"

WILD-EYED, Eddie Fritz lunged for the corner where Gills, trying to stifle his laughter, was cutting the glove from Joe Lopez' left hand, already swollen to the size of a grapefruit from two broken knuckles. By his side Billy Blainey, half insane, was chortling:

"It was the parrot, Eddie! The parrot, I tell yuh. Joe'll tell yuh, too. That's the only thing she knows in English 'ceptin' 'Pretty Polly.' She must have seen Abrams fondlin' the sponge and couldn't stand it no longer!"

The parrot was perched on Joe Lopez' shoulder, the sponge in her bill, when at last it dawned on slow-witted Eddie Fritz what had happened. With a snarl he plucked off the bird and with one fierce movement of his gloved hands stretched and wrung her neck.

A cry of rage, Gills and Blainey sent reeling backward, and a tiger for fury was onto the killer. There was no repelling this attack. It was one of murder. A hot-headed Latin with lust to kill; to kill and avenge the death of an almost human friend. A rain of blows and Eddie Fritz crumpled senseless to the floor while Joe Lopez swooned in the agony of another broken hand. From the ringside bedlam where mobs fought the police,—wrecking telegraph instruments and the improvised desks of the reporters, as excited as the swarm about them,—Lopez was carried behind a flying wedge of uniformed men to his dressing-room. There an hour later Carmine Diaz and her family found him sobbing with the dead pet in his bandaged hands.

THE fight had been history two days when an angry little Cuban swept down on Gills Arbor and, excitedly brandishing a newspaper, broke in on a porch confab between Eddie Gills and Blainey. The newspaper heralded in no modest manner an astounding statement signed by Eddie Gills in which he announced that Joe Lopez, light heavyweight champion of the world hereby vacated the title he had won by accident and retired from the prize-ring.

Every Manhattan newspaper carried the announcement on the front page. Also carried editorials inside proclaiming Eddie

The Mascot

Gills the finest, most outstanding example of honesty that a prize-ring, which made a business of bunking and bilking a long-suffering public with questionable matches, had ever produced.

On the floor about Eddie Gills' rocker were scattered a pile of newspapers. He had read them all. Chewing as usual on his dead cigar, he had smiled the smile of a fox and rubbing his bald head said to the man at his side, "Bunk, Billy, bunk. The real lowdown is this:

"Joe Lopez was all washed up as a prize-fighter when his hands went back on him and doubly washed up as a drawing-card when Fritz put the lights out on the parrot. And anyway Joe had gotten what he wanted from the ring, a bankroll and the girl and was lonesome for home. My having him vacate the title was partly for his sake and mostly for mine. Having him vacate it leaves it open to be fought for. The lad who's got the best chance to cop it is Kid Dugan. Ever since I shot the Cuban to the top, Dugan's been after me to let him give Harry Gowan the air and me manage him. Yesterday we reached an agreement. If there's a million in the title I'll make it with the Kid and make it fighting, not looking for soft—"

Just then the cigar-man broke in upon them.

"What does this mean?" he shouted, waving the newspaper he clutched feverishly under Billy Blainey's nose. "In Key West you give me to understand that if Joe Lopez won the title he would become a millionaire. I believed you and yesterday let him marry my daughter. Today I read—" He slapped the paper with an open hand— "What does it mean?"

"Don't yuh know?" Billy Blainey rose to the full height of his well-proportioned six feet. He did not wait for a reply, however. Spinning pudgy little Señor Diaz about as one would spin an open umbrella he grasped him firmly by the collar of his frock-coat with one hand and the seat of the pants with the other. Then with arms as unyielding as lightning-rods, he ran the choking, expostulating little Señor before him and did not stop until he reached the head of Gills' pier on Long Island Sound where with a heave he shot him far out and into the deep.

"There, yuh little panatela, yuh!" said Mr. Blainey, dusting off his hands as the Señor came gasping to the surface; "—now crawl out at Key West where yuh belong!"

A Woman Screamed

A tremendously vivid story of African adventure by a man who knows —the author of "Five Lions" and "Wild Honor."

By MARSHALL SCULL

A WOMAN screamed a piercing scream.

Churnside jumped for his rifle. Tippy the fox terrier fell off his lap.

The scream was so horrible it seemed that nothing could stop it. Churnside ran out of the house into the dusk of dawn.

Something stopped the scream. Over the eight-foot wall of the compound a huge lump humped itself and disappeared.

A horse squealed in terror, reared, and pulled a post out of the earth.

"Loose the dogs!" Churnside yelled. "Unbar the gate!" He leaped at the horse, Dick.

Men tore beams down, and the wall opened.

Out sprang Churnside, stabbing spurs into Dick. "Follow me!" Rifle and reins were in the left hand. His right hunted cartridges in a coat pocket. There were no extra cartridges in his pocket. Five in the rifle? He opened the magazine. Yes. Locked it.

Creaking of leather, and hammering of hoofs, and Dick's pulsing panting, and the whir of the wind filled his ears.

The lion ahead bounded in great strides with the woman in his mouth. The lion ran as well as if he had a baby or a bird. The woman was not screaming any more. Churnside could see her legs skip on the ground now and then. He ran over her cloth, ripped from her loins.

Behind him, seen in one swift glance, Magundi, her father, came running. A flurry, a clamor, and the dogs poured out

A Woman Screamed



of the wattled walls, came, grew bigger, swept by him, baying like hounds. The lion dropped the woman and spurted away. He flattened down on the horizon and went level like an antelope. Between him and Churnside now was the pack, many breeds, rippling backs, brown, white, black, yellow patches, spreading, narrowing, swerving, diminishing in the distance, howling straight after the man-killer.

Past Ankata's naked brown body Churnside drove; she moved her hands. He settled to his riding. Yellow earth sped underfoot. Sunrise burst white over the rim of the plain at his left. A warthog popped out of the ground, snorted surprise, dashed away to his right, with the sun gleaming on its tusks. Dick cleared the hole.

A mile of gray-yellow plain slithered under the beating hoofs.

The pack had come close up with the lion and were giving him a fright. They were on his flanks, behind him, not much in front, or he could swerve and reach them without faltering, but close, so that they nipped and worried him. Churnside could see, as he gradually caught up, that the lion was tired and would soon forget his fear enough to stop and fight it out. Dick was running easily, one hundred yards back of the lion, who, swinging his big-maned head from side to side, could see horse and man every time. The dogs were eager.

Without warning, Dick dropped from in front of Churnside: the whole forequarters,

neck and head of the horse fell away—and the man stayed in the air and went on. He heard a sickening crack, as if a thick dry pole had snapped. Then he struck ground, with shoulder and side of head, and felt something break, and his legs turned over till his feet whacked hard and stopped with a piercing pain in his leg.

He was instantly in the middle of the fight, among the dogs, and the lion had him by the leg, for the beast had stopped and charged and got to him, and the dogs also had turned. The rifle was gone and Dick was threshing about, trying to get a broken leg out of the hole, and Magundi, the nearest human being, might be a mile back, maybe not coming on at all. Dogs were stamping all over him, snarl-

ing, biting, barking, worrying the lion and preventing him from tearing Churnside to pieces, or killing him quickly with muzzle to his throat or long teeth through his skull.

The lion chewed up Churnside's right leg, crushing the bone, sending frightful pain shooting up his body, and then a dog would seize the lion's hind leg and make him turn with a growl and a rush to beat the dog's brains out with one lightning whisk of a paw. Back he surged at Churnside and crunched the shin bone more, twisting and turning his mouth this side and that like a cat to get the bone between his big grinding teeth. And then another dog, fastening into the flanks or quarters, would make him rush off once more to snap and perhaps kill the tormentor and give him time to pounce back on the man.

DOG after dog gave its life for the master in this way, for the lion was exceptionally active, and in all his previous games of this sort Churnside had never allowed a lion leisure enough to kill off his pack dog by dog before he came in with the finishing shot. But the dogs were plucky and let the lion have no peace, and Churnside, wondering where his rifle had flown to, wondered what he could do about it. In addition to the pain, which was agonizing, he was in imminent danger of being killed, Dick was ruined, and he was seeing his best dogs blotted out one after another. Nasty!

It was a deafening row: the lion growled horribly when he flew at a dog and growled louder when he swung again in his periodical attack and fell on the man. Probably, Churnside thought, if the lion discovered him to be alive, he would come in and kill him without more delay. Evidently he must lie quiet and let the lion chew his leg as the price of life.

"Rrrrrrrrrrr!" roared the lion and whirled, and sent the collie Topsy through the air twenty feet to bump and lie twitching on the ground.

HE seized Churnside by the flesh of his thigh and dragged him a yard, but before he had put one foot down to hold the leg so that he could tear the flesh off, Brownie, a young Airedale, was on his ham and made him fling about to destroy. Brownie dodged and escaped, and the lion came back to Churnside, but the dog bit him again, and he caught the dog with one paw and tore his whole belly out. Only three dogs were now left, of the dozen that started in the chase. Another Airedale was too slow for the lightning strokes of the lion. The remaining two had survived partly because they were not so bold and had not ventured close in. The end seemed soon.

Churnside heard a shrill "*Yip-yip-yip!*" and little Tippy came at top speed and bit the lion's right rear leg and danced away barking. He was so quick and light that the lion could not catch him. Tippy would nip the tail or a leg and dart off safely before the huge head or paws could fan the space he had stood in. He gave the lion no moment to damage Churnside worse than he already had. The lion grew furious, growled and snarled continuously, making short rushes to and from the man, but could not reach the little dog. Tippy seemed to understand that he would have to keep on annoying the lion or his master would be killed, for he never stopped snapping at the great rear-quarters and barking his little cry of hate and challenge.

NOW Magundi arrived, out of breath, and like the good old fellow he was, first of all found the rifle and then spoke to Churnside and asked him how to unlock it so that he could shoot, for he did

not understand the action of a Mauser. The lion paid no attention to the black man.

Churnside, then, in the leisurely native phrases, instructed Magundi how to turn over to his left the catch of the rifle, so that he could pull the trigger and fire. "Take with your finger and your thumb the small ear of iron—the ear lies down like a leaf on the side of the rifle; you stand with your back to the land of the Abyssinians and turn your face toward the going down of the sun, and then you see that side, and then you lift that little ear with your finger and your thumb and turn it over to the other side—the other side is the side of the rising of the sun, you standing with your back to the country of the Abyssinians; and then you point the rifle straight at the breast of the lion and shoot him through the heart and he will die."

All this while the lion was tearing his legs to pieces and savagely trying to kill the tormenting little Tippy.

MAGUNDI crouched, holding the gun so that it projected over Churnside's face, waited an instant till the beast turned, and fired a belching spot of flame and gas. The lion reared on his hindlegs, battled the air with his forefeet, and toppled over backward, and died with a long groan. The two cowardly dogs lay down at a distance.

"Shoot Dick in the head," Churnside ordered, and closed his eyes.

A second shot crashed.

Tippy came prancing to Churnside's face, wagging his white stump of a tail in dog's joy, and licked Churnside's face all over, repeatedly, making a delighted little slobbering sound: "*Hlob—hlob—hlob—hlob—hlob!*" And then, in a minute, he stretched himself on the man's breast with his jaw on his paws, and lay still, moving his eyes but not his head, looking at Churnside and Magundi, and at anything else that caught his notice.

"Is Ankata alive?" Churnside asked.

Magundi said: "She is not alive."

Presently Tippy raised his head and growled, and Magundi said that men were coming. Help was coming from the violated fortress of their home.

"The Cat of the Cañons," a remarkable Arizona wild-animal story by a professional hunter, Jay Lucas, will appear in an early issue. Don't miss it!



The Hoodoo at Feng Hsu

This latest adventure of Grigsby the engineer well sustains Mr. New's reputation as a writer of vigorous and convincing stories that deal realistically with the far places of the earth.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

IT was "ladies' night," at the Engineers Club in New York, and the Grigsbys were entertaining a few old friends, among whom were two couples who had been neighbors in a Flatbush apartment-house before they went to China. Tom Smithers had just been telling them that he knew their old apartment was to be vacated on the first of the month, and Julia Rockwell had added: "Of course, after being clear on the other side of the world for three years, you'll want to stay home for a while now, Joan—a few years, anyhow! And honestly, you can't do better than the old building, for the price. Forbes and I have looked around every year, but there's nothing as good, and the new landlord is almost too nice to last!"

In another moment it would have been settled that they would take another lease on their old home with its delightful memories of their first married year—but with the words almost on their lips, one of the pages came hurrying into the dining-room, like a noiseless apparition, and laid two envelopes by John Grigsby's plate—one

a radiogram from Hongkong, and the other a telegram from Washington:

Grigsby—Engineers Club—New York. Masonry dynamited. Valley and plain flooded. Canals partly washed out. Can you return at once? Take full charge from receipt of this? Salary up to you. See Frothingham. COLLINS.

The telegram was from the president of the Anglo-American Syndicate who owned a Government concession for the irrigating project in China:

John Grigsby, care Engineers Club, New York. Bad news from Feng Hsu. Probably year or two of reconstruction. Need you in charge, and to organize against similar occurrence in future. Will salary twenty thousand do? If not, name any reasonable figure—but catch Empress of Australia at Vancouver Saturday.
FENG HSU IRRIGATION & POWER CO.
FROTHINGHAM—Pres. & Treas.

The engineer passed over the radiogram to his wife, and the color flamed into her cheeks as she grasped what had happened in far-away Indo-China:

"Oh, John! Our beautiful dam! Our fine canal-system! *Who* could have done such a perfectly beastly thing?"

GRIGSBY'S jaw was set in a way that would have meant trouble for some one if the party had happened to be within reach, but his voice was under perfect control.

"Feel like going back to find out, Joan? We can make the *Empress* easily enough—with nearly a day to spare, if we catch the *Century* tomorrow." Joan glanced around the table at their friends, who vaguely sensed a catastrophe but didn't dream that it could possibly start them back half around the world inside of the next twelve hours—then into her husband's eyes, with perfect understanding.

"Guess we'll have to, John! Nothing else we can do, is there? Not much question as to your being the best man for the job!"

"H-m-m—there's no question upon any point but your side of it. I promised, you know, that we'd stick around home for two or three years, at least, if there was anything here worth while. It's up to you, girl."

"Then it's settled right now! I wouldn't be happy a minute staying here and imagining what a mess some other man would make of that situation, aside from the scientific part, if he didn't know all the ins and outs of the game as we do!"

She had passed the radiogram to Julia Rockwell, who in turn handed it around the table. While they were reading it, the gayety of the little party was perceptibly dampened—the minds of their friends not readily grasping reasons which they considered sufficient to send the Grigsbys back into what they supposed a thoroughly barbarous country at a moment's notice, after three long years of exile, when they had so richly earned a rest and change of environment. Previously there had been little mention of the Grigsbys' activities in the Orient, but they now began to sense the bigness of what the engineer had undertaken. So now, and until after midnight, they dragged out of them exciting bits of their experiences—outwitting a powerful gang of political grafters who had ruined the stockholders of the old French company—getting their implements, material and supplies up-river on the Chinese side where their enemies had no chance to destroy or make away with them—han-

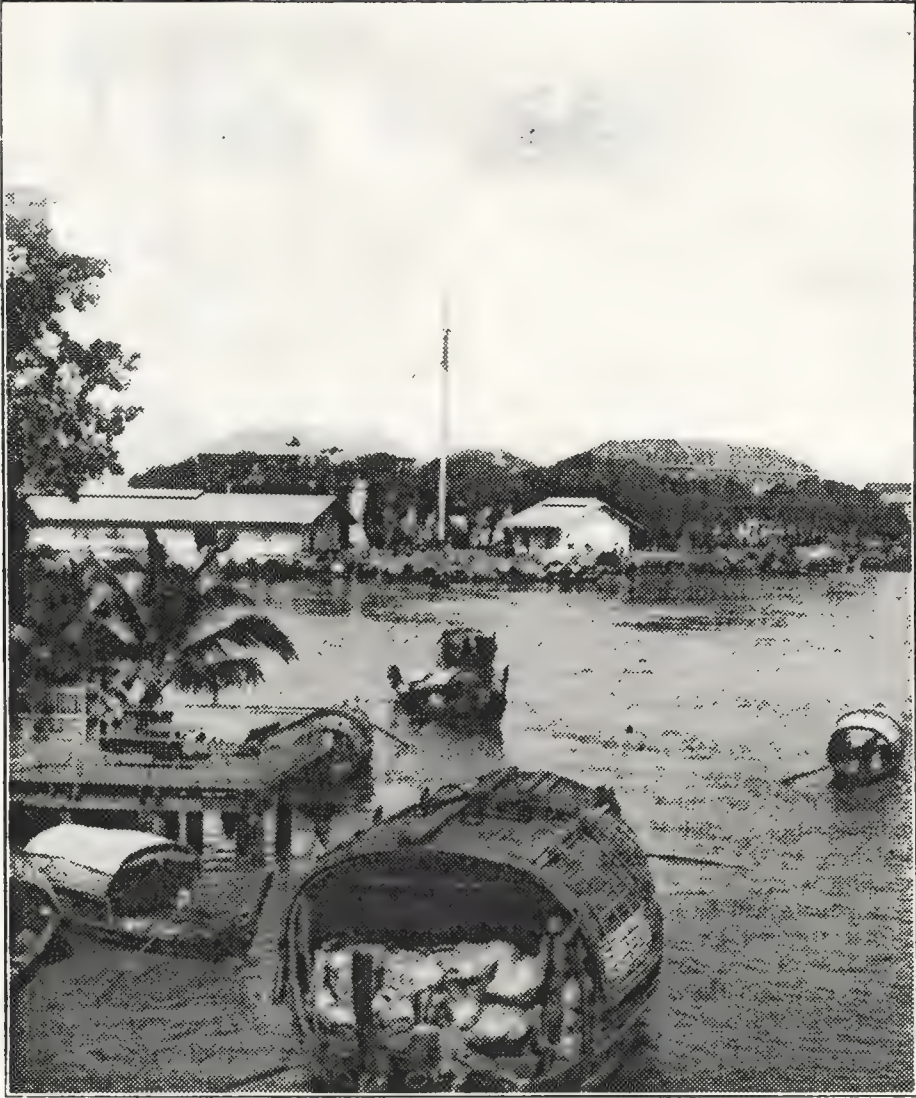
dling Asiatic laborers in the foothills of the back-country where casual murders or attacks from prowling beasts were matters of daily occurrence. The dinner was a success, after all—they were unanimous upon that point.

During the next morning John Grigsby talked over the phone with General Frothingham in Washington, getting from him the assurance that a certain suggestion had been acted upon some months before. He then booked passage at the C. P. R. offices in Madison Avenue under assumed names, knowing that their political enemies in Hanoi would be watching all steamship departures from the Coast. After that he sent a code-radiogram to Collins—the confidential agent of the syndicate in Hongkong:

Accept no resignations—will need entire staff. Inventory and overhaul very carefully all tools and material on hand. Make exact survey of damage and probable extent of reconstruction. Put Frayne in charge, temporarily—McClintock, Assistant. No argument from other men—this goes.

Had this message been intercepted and its contents successfully decoded,—which was less than a thousandth chance,—it would have seemed merely obvious instructions from the reappointed chief engineer, not susceptible of being twisted into any other meaning. But Collins grinned in thorough appreciation as he translated it, knowing that the sender was positive of foul play somewhere and determined to ferret it out if he was a year or more doing it. As for the tools and materials—that gave the agent an uneasy feeling which sent him back up to Feng Hsu as quickly as he could get there. It hadn't occurred to him that any damage could have been done to their equipment beyond that for which the flood was responsible. He now realized, however, that if there had been treachery in their own camp, it easily might have extended to pretty general sabotage—and while considering this point, it suddenly occurred to him that one of the engineers had offered his resignation, but had yielded to McClintock's advice to reconsider.

IT just happened that nobody on the steamer knew the Grigsbys—which was a lucky chance, inasmuch as steamer-officers who did know and like the engineer were pretty thick on the Pacific and in Asiatic waters. So they were able to main-



Photograph © by Underwood & Underwood

The river at Saigon, Indo-China, whence the Grigsbys proceeded to Feng Hsu.

tain their assumed identities until arrival in Hongkong, where they went at once to the bungalow of some old friends up in the Peak District, and found Collins awaiting them. The syndicate agent plainly showed his satisfaction at getting them back in charge of the reconstruction, but there were deeper creases between his eyes than when they had last seen him—an additional line or two of worry. Taxed with this, he said quite frankly:

“There’s no question whatever that you’ll be able, one way or another, to restore the works in as good or better condition than they were when you got

through—provided we can raise the money! That’s where we’re up against it! Feng Hsu has the reputation of being hoodooed—now, more so than ever. People with money aren’t going to feel like taking another chance with it. I don’t think the General quite realizes how widespread this feeling is, out here—he seems to have no apprehension about getting all the money we need, and so far, I haven’t had the nerve to tell him how the proposition looks.”

“Do you know *why* he isn’t worrying, Dave? Remember that insurance man we took over from Hongkong in the big plane

—the one who really expected to be killed going or coming? We took him over the whole project, you know, after the irrigation-canals were open for business—gave him a lot of photographs. Well, he represented Lloyd's—the only concern in the world which will gamble upon anything of that size. They issued a policy for ten millions—and Frothingham has paid the premiums right on the nail. That same Lloyd's agent, Merriweather, is on his way here from Singapore,—next P. & O. boat,—but he intends to go up by Hai Phong and Hanoi—swears he won't make the trip by plane again. If he comes that way, he's going to be tampered with until he'll cable some report that will tie us up in the courts and dish us out of the money we need to make a start. You and the Hongkong members of the Syndicate have got to go out on a tug and meet that steamer before she gets in—then fetch him up in a fast power-launch by way of the Chinese rivers and Wu-Pei-Foh's province, where we'll meet you. He just missed the Messageries to Saigon, or he'd have come that way, and we'd have been up against it.

“Unless our whole construction is a total loss, which you haven't led me to believe by a good deal, we can't get the whole ten millions—but I think if he can be gotten up there to see for himself just what the conditions are and what undoubtedly happened, there will be no question in his mind that we can be implicated in any way, because it was too clearly to our interest to maintain the project in serviceable operation and collect the rents from our irrigation and power leases. He will allow us somewhere between four and six millions, I think—enough to keep us going for some time—and the General has no doubts of being able to float an issue of common stock in Wall Street, making the present issue a preferred one. Now—if you've got a plane here which has just been thoroughly overhauled, Joan and I will start for the camp at once—should reach Feng Hsu in time for tiffin, with the wind blowing as it is.”

IT was a rather sober-faced party of men who met them when they came down at the construction-camp—each speculating inwardly upon what the chief and his much-admired wife were probably thinking of those whom they had left in charge. Their old quarters in the best-equipped

bungalow had been overhauled and put in perfect order for them—Lem Sing having laid himself out upon an appetizing meal which was just ready to serve. A trait which had always impressed them in Grigsby was his poise—a suggestion of perfect deliberation which nothing seemed to jar or destroy. He could and did act with amazing quickness when it was necessary—but not until then.

Thus his manner as he sat there at table chatting with his old associates was that of a man who hasn't a care in the world and nothing of importance on his mind. Heathcote impulsively started upon some account of the catastrophe, but Grigsby smilingly flagged him as he filled and lighted his pipe with the deliberation they remembered so well.

“Time enough for details when I begin asking questions, old chap—we'll ride about and have a look-see, presently, when we've digested this tiffin a bit. You've still mounts enough to go round, haven't you, Billy? Might have 'em saddled and ready, here, in fifteen minutes or so—eh?”

Forbes glanced out of the window from where he sat.

“I sort of figured you and Mrs. Boss might be thinking of a ride this afternoon, Chief—the coolies are fetching the beasties along, now, with Lady Boss' saddle on Bess. That mare has sure been pampered since you left!”

FROM the genial and interesting talker he had been during the meal, the engineer switched to a taciturn individual whose keen eyes roamed from one detail of the big construction-project to another as he trotted or cantered along. When they got down on the plain where the flood had spread and thinned out, so that portions of the canal system had been left intact with little or no damage,—as it seemed at first glance,—Grigsby pulled up his horse abruptly and rode along one of the canals to a thoroughly dry paddy where the rice had withered and fallen over dead on the now caked mud for lack of moisture. Where the canal had branched off from the main feeding-stream, its banks were fairly saturated with gasoline, which apparently had floated its entire length and dribbled over the little dikes into the paddies. Grigsby pointed this out—asking:

“Did you all notice that stuff when you made your first examination—right after the explosion and flood?”

There was dead silence for a moment or two while the other men looked—and sniffed.

"Hmph! Now that you've called my attention to it, Chief, I fancy there was a slight odor of petrol at one or two points along the plain at the time—nothin' like as much as this, you know—but I fancied it merely drippings from the old battered cars. Had nothing to do with the dynamiting or its effects, which were all we looked for at the time."

THIS from Brompton, the other Englishman recommended by the Hongkong shareholders. Forbes and McClintock both shook their heads—they hadn't noticed the stuff before.

"I suppose you chaps didn't keep the whole of our concession very thoroughly policed after the mischief was done—eh? No apparent object in it until we'd built up something worth destroying again?"

They nodded, rather doubtfully.

"Well—most anybody would have looked at it that way. And if the object had been merely to destroy our construction,—discredit us, and hoodoo our irrigation project to such an extent that nobody would tackle it again,—further policing *would* have seemed a sheer waste of money. But—do you chaps know what gasoline—petrol, as you call it out here—will do to growing rice, if you float enough of it over the paddies so that it soaks into the mud when the water is drained off somewhat? I've never tried it myself—but I'd say at a guess that the result would be about what it is when you pour the stuff on a lawn two or three times. Those paddies must have been just about sprouting into the thickest, richest crop of rice I've ever yet seen, before the explosion—but if we don't get busy and stop this thing right where it is, before that oil is spread over every paddy on the plain, nobody will be able to grow rice or any other cereal here for several years! Question is—are the very planters who leased the water from us in some game to ruin themselves and run up the price of rice in Hanoi—or is some other crowd trying to put *them* out of business along with our irrigation project? With this territory thoroughly developed and planted, it would send down enough rice to affect the quotations all through Indo-China. And we've got to figure out the size of the elephant we're bucking against, this time—or we wont last at all!"

When they got back to the camp, Grigsby asked if they had carefully overhauled all of their tools and the stock of material on hand—which brought a tired grin to McClintock's rugged face.

"Chief, your cable to Collins was an eye-opener and a life-saver. We've got to hand it to you, because the idea never occurred to us that the worst hadn't already happened when we saw the effects of that blowout! You see, there didn't seem to be any point in trying to put our tools and remaining stock of material out of business when we all rather doubted if any investors could be found willing to put up money for another try at this proposition. But that cable has sure kept us busy since you sent it! Two of the steam-shovels would have been junk after another night's tampering with them—we'll have to get new parts from Hongkong, as it is. Some of the cement had had buckets of water poured over the bags until the stuff had set like so much rock. But the damned skunks had only begun when we got after them—shot two the first night—coolies from the lower country who had mixed in with ours. I think all of our own coolies are perfectly straight—and I know all of Wu-Pei-Foh's are! He lent me a hundred more of 'em for police—said we could have all we needed, and they're glad to work for us—don't like the lowlanders for a cent.

"WELL—they answered for a dozen more of our enemies. What they left when they got through, I don't think Lady Boss would care to hear about. Thanks to your tip, we've got tools, planes and general equipment enough to make a start at reconstruction and keep fairly busy until you get more stuff from Hongkong. We'll put more of the Touchan's coolies policing the lower district before morning, or as soon as he can get them down there—before noon, anyway. Get him by radio and have 'em started over here at once—he arms 'em pretty well, too. When he heard you and Lady Boss were coming, he was delighted—said he'd be over as soon as you arrived. When you and Mrs. Joan saved that bird from croaking with acute indigestion, Chief, you did a big thing for our construction, here—anything he's got is yours! How soon will you commence reconstruction—tomorrow?"

"Not if I know it! Don't let anybody disturb a solitary thing anywhere on our

land if you can help it. If Merriweather can be fetched up here in a roundabout way before that Hanoi crowd get to him, we can show just what happened—and start with a good-sized hunk of insurance. But if they manage to sidetrack him, he'll never get up here at all. Collins should meet him outside of Hongkong tomorrow—the rest is up to him and our influential shareholders over there."

"And—if the Hanoi crowd do manage to see him in Hongkong?"

"We'll have to get along without that insurance—probably reorganize and finance in some other way—time enough to cross that bridge when none of the others hold. By the way,—this petrol business keeps sticking in my mind,—how many of the planters, our water and power lessees, are still at their bungalows down there along the plain? Apparently nothing to keep them up here—the crop is a total loss. I suppose most of them beat it for Hanoi, didn't they?"

"M-well—they did, and they didn't, Chief. All of 'em but Lafourche and Mermet did go down to the metropolis within a few days after the big noise; yet seven or eight came back again—and then, more. Far as I know, they're at their bungalows now."

"H-m-m—seems to me I get a sniff of petrol in that direction, too! If anybody really gets down to a systematic plan for destroying this rice district, they'll try something a bit cheaper than petrol and more certain in its immediate effect. I can understand Lafourche and Mermet staying on up here, because they know something about our crowd and wouldn't have much doubt as to the reconstruction. But most of those other birds wouldn't really believe it if you told 'em we were going to begin tomorrow. . . . Look here! You fellows get busy with your policing! I'll ride along down and see Lafourche—it's not over eighteen miles there and back—on second thought, I'll take one of the Lizzies. Ought to show up for a late supper—unless—no, I won't stay down there."

WHEN Grigsby stepped upon the veranda of the genial Frenchman's bungalow, Lafourche came hurrying out to fall upon his neck. It was too good to be true! There was almost certainty, you observe, that the so able General Frothingham and his wealthy syndicate would not abandon

operations because of one serious reverse—that made itself to be seen, obviously. But that he would be able to persuade our dear friends the Grigsbys to return after their so arduous three years was almost beyond hoping! And Madame? She was quite her charming self? Yes?

"We're both in pretty good shape, old one! Ready to put up all the fight that Hanoi crowd ask for! Now—let's get down to the guts of this game, because I can't stay long this time! What do you know about this petrol in the paddies? Whose idea is it? Why? What's behind it?"

"The rice-market, my friend—obviously! You will observe there is no petrol in my paddies—unless some of my coolies have been killed since morning. It is not to be found in the paddies of the so good Mermet. The half-grown crop stretching below your barrage for seventy kilometers down the big plain was the largest for the acreage which has ever been known. It had lowered in advance the quotations in Hanoi and Saigon—a number of points—the lowest price for early delivery ever known on this coast. All the rice in sight was bought at the lowest point touched—speculators, of course—and is now held by them. Owing to your disaster up there, at least a third of the season's crop cannot be delivered. The sellers will have to import from the Philippines and Dutch Indies if they are fortunate enough to obtain it at any price. Meanwhile—current quotations have doubled. It is to be considered as certainty that at least six of the planters in this district bought at the low mark—before their own crops were destroyed—and sold nothing! One has belief that they knew of the dynamiting in advance—though perhaps not directly implicated. Their position now is not, you observe, of the uncertain or unfortunate sort. They own large quantities of rice grown in other places. The price has doubled—it still ascends! When the actual grain is in hand for delivery, they make a profit of millions! The longer it is held, the more those in necessity for its use must pay! The petrol, look you, has been floated into the paddies of planters who were not in the scheme and will be sure to begin cultivation again as soon as you present them with the so necessary water. The gamblers will not destroy their own paddies—because—if the so great irrigation company does reconstruct, they may

wish to raise another so marvelous crop until the price drops—and then feel resignation if something destroys it, to send the price up. It is a position of advantage, you observe!”

“Yeah—I kinda think I do. Only, *mon vieux*, after we reconstruct—well, I think I can promise you there’ll be damn’ little rice destroyed in this district!”

“Ah! That, if you were to ask, is the reason why I refused to join the others when certain advances were made—in the so polite and vague manner. I plunge! I leap! I take the chance, you observe, that our canals are again filled with the so good and plentiful water—that I collect insurance upon this crop which has been destroyed—and grow another, *à la bonne heure*. Voilà! And my colleague Mermet also.”

“Lafourche, my good friend—that mark of trust and confidence is something I appreciate most deeply! Madame, also, will wish to thank you for it! Come! Ride back with me and dine with us—telephone Mermet. We make the little celebration tonight—yes?”

THE two Frenchmen were delighted. With all their confidence in the Anglo-American Syndicate back of the irrigation project, neither had anticipated that John Grigsby and his charming wife could be induced to return for a year or two, if at all. Their actual presence on the ground was reason enough for any celebration they could devise or assist in pulling off. But before leaving their plantations, each called up his reliable foreman and gave strict orders that their coolies were to shoot on sight anyone seen prowling near the paddies. At the camp they were easily induced to stay over a few days—Billy Frayne’s constabulary of coolies policing all of the planted area including that of the speculators as well as the honest rice-growers. Presently, Collins arrived in camp with the Lloyd’s agent, Merriweather—having made forced runs up the Chinese rivers in a high-powered speed-launch several miles beyond what was technically considered the head of navigation—the launch, in one instance, being hauled out and around certain river-obstructions on rollers. Then came a ride through a corner of Wu-Pei-Foh’s province in a battered flivver. Merriweather had been taken off the P. & O. boat outside the Ladrones on a seagoing tug which ran up

the river to Canton without going into Hongkong harbor at all—so that the Hanoi men who boarded the steamer off Blake Pier could find no trace of him whatever.

A plan had been taking shape in Grigsby’s mind while he rode about the immediate vicinity with the Lloyd’s agent, showing him exactly what had happened—and he outlined it to his French lessees before they left to ride home again. They saw no difficulties—assured him of their full coöperation, and during the next two days, made a point of calling up each of the other planters in the district with the suggestion that they get together immediately for a conference at Lafourche’s bungalow.

This they did—upon the second evening. If there were any chance of getting Lafourche and Mermet to throw in with their crowd, it seemed worth some trouble to bring about—inasmuch as those two, with five other planters who followed their lead in almost everything, could very seriously interfere with the market manipulation if they once succeeded in raising a big crop and getting it down to tidewater. So much did matters appear to be going their way that they were more than usually courteous to Grigsby when he unexpectedly turned up before dinner with a man whom he introduced as Schofield, his consulting engineer. As this individual had a six-day growth of black beard on his face, even the two planters who had once met the Lloyd’s man in one of the Saigon clubs never thought of anything familiar in his appearance or, in fact, paid any attention to him. After dinner, during which the discussion had been upon any interesting thing under the sun except the immediate problem in the neighborhood, Grigsby lighted his pipe and remarked to the planter who was understood to have the most influence in Hanoi:

“M’sieur Tribaut, up at our camp we understand perfectly what our immediate problem is—have a pretty close idea as to the parties responsible for it—have no doubts at all that we will have water in your canals within sixteen or eighteen months. But we can’t seem to figure out your end of it. Our syndicate holds perfectly good thirty-year leases from each one of you for irrigation-water in your canals and power wherever you’ve dammed them or put in turbine-sluiques. Under those leases, we don’t care whether you raise

rice or not—don't give a whoop if you spend all your time in Hanoi with the ladies. Because, if the water is in your canals, you pay us our rentals when due, whether you use it or not, and any failure to pay constitutes a lien on your land. Those leases are iron-clad, messieurs—good in any court of these colonies, or in France itself. So—we can't see any point in the rumors which have reached us that you mean to discontinue planting except when you happen to feel like it—and aren't going to feel like it often. If there's any truth in that—well, it won't be long before we own your land, and you can bet your sweet lives we'll plant it when we do! Foreclose as soon as the law lets us—to keep the land from lying idle. Of course, I haven't much doubt that you bought the land up here, way outside of civilization, for a song—so may not stand to lose much on it. But—can't you give us some idea as to what we may expect from you?"

FOR a moment there was silence born of complete surprise. Except in secret conference with the obstructionist gang in Hanoi, there had been no discussion whatever of deliberately failing to plant rice as a matter of speculation, when there was plenty of water to grow it. True, they had taken advantage of the catastrophe which put the irrigation system out of business, and it was difficult to see how they could have done so without advance knowledge of what was going to happen—but there had been no admission that they had secretly purchased large quantities of Japanese and Dutch Indies rice at the lowest quotation touched, and were holding it to sell at the highest in place of the crop they had lost. So Grigsby's knowledge of their secret intentions was more or less of a bombshell.

Tribaut, however, was smooth enough to deceive those who didn't know him very well, and his reply brought a grin of appreciation to Grigsby's face.

"Me—I cannot comprehend, M'sieur Grigsbee, where you obtain the 'rumor,' as you call heem. It makes itself clear, one understands, that the owner of any land has absolute right to plant it according to his best judgment—or let it lie enriching itself for a season or two. That is a matter which concerns nobody except the owner. As for the water—if it is not needed for power or cultivation, one merely closes the

canals on his property and does not permit any inflow from the main channel. If he gets no water—uses no water—obviously he pays no rental whatsoever for any water. *Non?*"

"I would suggest, m'sieur, that you glance over the wording of our concession from the Colonial Government and our leases to you. In the concession it is distinctly stated that all land supplied with water by our irrigation system shall be taxed for that water in the same way that every large city is taxed—without measurement. (The expense of maintaining and inspecting meters over an area of this size would be prohibitive.) Rice, as you all well know, is the staple food of every native in these colonies—and as such, a matter of immediate concern to the Government for its troops and employees. When purchasing your land covered by our concession, there was a clause in the agreement you signed which gave the Colonial Government the option to purchase at any time, according to its needs, all the rice you produce—at a fixed price based upon a ten-year average of the market quotations."

"I had not understood it that way—but I cannot dispute M'sieur's statements until I read my contract again. It would be some time, however, before the property could be sold for arrears in water-rates. Of course no contract binds us to pay anything until you are again supplying us with water—a matter of three or four years, at least—"

"Say eighteen months, if you wish to be conservative, m'sieur."

"Ah! I had not supposed that possible! To be quite frank, I fear I am not so optimistic. This whole project is under an evil spell—it has been from the moment the old French company was organized. Many of us are superstitious—I admit being so, myself. The feeling is growing among us to make some other disposition of our land. Considering the original cost to us, it seems worth holding for speculation at least. If something can be done to make the property more remunerative—obviously, that is a matter for each individual owner to decide for himself. I cannot see how it concerns your company or its officers in any way. But—come, now! There is no point in disputing the question. Personally, I do not think this irrigation project ever can be made successful in this particular locality. In a short

while, you yourself will be at liberty to consider other offers. In this connection it is my good fortune to be interested in other developments—in Formosa and the Philippines—and in position to make you a tentative offer as chief engineer. Your ability has been amply demonstrated—is widely recognized. Such men come high—but are worth it. I can offer you a salary of thirty thousand dollars a year, with a bonus of ten thousand upon your acceptance—and I'd be pleased to make out a draft for that bonus *now*, to convince you that I am not joking!"

"**P**ERMIT me to believe, m'sieur, that you *are* joking. In that way, I can still assume you to be a gentleman. You see, trying to bribe a man who has always been absolutely straight, means to keep right on being straight, is so very much the sort of thing no gentleman would attempt. So it is understood, of course, that you were joking. As for its being impossible for our irrigation project to succeed—well, put a price on your land, and we'll float a syndicate to buy it! The Colonial Government granted us our concession upon the understanding that it was to form a rice-reserve in time of war or in a bad season elsewhere. Any failure to grow rice here would be a matter of immediate concern to the Government—and even upon the floor of the *Chambre* in Paris. Now—Schofield and I must be riding back. We've enjoyed this little informal discussion very much, but we're policing the entire district, now—which involves a lot of detail. We don't mean to be caught napping again if we can help it. *Au 'voir, messieurs.*"

On the ride back to camp Merriweather appeared to be turning matters over in his mind—had little to say for the first mile. He had now gotten the whole picture with all of its menacing features, but also with a pretty good side-light upon the sort of man in charge of the project and the men he had picked for assistants. There had been a few moments at Lafourche's when he looked for trouble at any moment—helplessly feeling that anything happening to Grigsby must also include him, in his assumed character as consulting engineer.

Presently Grigsby opened the subject: "Well—you've seen what happened here, Merriweather, and you know we'll not let them stop us—this wont happen again if we can prevent it. You understand that if

you'd come up by way of Hai Phong and Hanoi, you'd have been given a vastly different impression of our situation, here. Now—what's your decision?"

"Why—as closely as I can figure it, old chap, your loss will exceed the ten millions we're carrying on you—perfectly clear bona-fide loss. The seventy per cent clause in our policy would make it seven millions when we salvage nothing. Well—we'll pay you that. I'll give you a memorandum agreement as soon as we reach camp—and deposit the seven millions to your credit with the Hongkong & Shanghai as soon as I get down to Hongkong. (They've a goodish bit of our money.) We will also issue you another policy at the same rate, if you wish it."

"That's bully! We'll begin on the reconstruction Monday—four days after the funds should be available. I'll take you across in our newest plane if you care for another flight with me, or we'll send you down as you came, if you prefer."

"The flivver an' the power-launch will do me very well, thanks! I'm sixty-five, Grigsby; an' frankly, you know, this rushin' through the air—way up where no human being has any business to be—is a bit too much for my nerves, d'ye see. I fancied there'd be nothin' of a dangerous nature to jolt me, comin' up in that gem of a launch—an' then you take me down among a lot of bounders where I jolly well expected to be shot before we were out of it! I'm a man of peace, Grigsby—quite willing to leave the adventurous life to chaps like you who seem to thrive on it. 'Pon honor, you know, I never saw you or Mrs. Grigsby lookin' as fit as you do just now. Er—don't go pokin' about for trouble, man—you're still young, you know! An' it's a pretty decent old world, at that!"

FROM the time he had taken the Lloyd's agent from his steamer outside of Hongkong, Dave Collins—Asiatic representative of the syndicate—had "personally conducted" Merriweather every foot of the way up through the Chinese rivers and foothills until they reached the construction-camp. He knew better than anyone else except the Grigsbys how much depended upon getting Merriweather safely up to the scene of operations where he could size up for himself the extent of damage resulting from the dynamiting—and how equally important it was to get

him safely back to Hongkong without anything happening to him before he could deposit the insurance money to his company's credit. When they had finally left, with a special guard of the Touchan's coolies, Grigsby felt that he now had time for a sifting of immediate local conditions which had made the dynamiting possible. The attitude of the speculative planters he knew to be merely another phase of the Hanoi influence which had been opposed to the project from the start. Being a known quantity which could be anticipated and dealt with, it didn't disturb him. But although it was now generally assumed by most of the men under him that he had decided to let the dynamiting go as an unsolved mystery, and concentrate upon reconstruction, only Billy Frayne and the more taciturn McClintock were familiar enough with his mental processes to be certain that he wouldn't move a step on intensive reconstruction until he knew exactly who had been responsible for the dynamiting and had taken measures to insure against a similar recurrence.

THEIR chief had, so far, made no move toward starting up, and Brompton, Heathcote and the various foremen of construction—constabulary officers and the like—were all at sea in regard to what was going to be done, or when. The whole district was being rigidly policed. Tools and machinery were being repaired, cement and other material carefully overhauled and guarded. But all this detail was more or less automatic. Brompton and Heathcote were responsible for certain portions of it, but failed to realize that none of them were really vital, the work being perfunctory and leaving them with more or less spare time on their hands. The foremen also appeared to be marking time until something like a real start was made. But had any of them been curious enough to keep tab on the Chief's two assistants, they would have noticed that, while Frayne and McClintock apparently had as much spare time as the others, they amused themselves in a different way. Each would start off for a long ride to get the kinks out of his legs after they'd been on their feet directing minor work for several hours, though never together. In the evenings they usually smoked and chatted on the veranda of the headquarters bungalow. But each knew exactly what was going on from one end of the lake above the dam to the far-

thest plantation at the other end of the district—and the amount of telephoning they did from various bungalows or construction-shacks would have surprised the others, had they known of it. In the evening chats upon the Grigsbys' veranda—although a wide range of topics were discussed—there was always an exact understanding before they left as to conditions throughout the whole project.

AFTER dinner, the day when Collins and Merriweather left camp, Grigsby left his two friends with Joan on the veranda and strolled down to the bungalow occupied by the two Englishmen—where he found Heathcote, alone in the living-room doing a crossword puzzle. Grigsby said:

"Like that sort of thing, Heathcote? Find it holds your interest right along?"

"Why—aye, sir. Until we start up construction again, there's a good bit of spare time to put in. I've read all the books in camp that are worth readin'—can't play cards all the time, you know, even if my screw were high enough to stand it. There's only so much perfunctory work to be done just now—an' a lot of time to kill outside of that."

"H-m-m—my wife and I picked up some of the Chinese and Malay dialects in off-hours. They come in mighty handy at times. But of course what you do with your spare time is your own affair. Where's Brompton?"

"Down at the concrete boss' shack, I fancy. There's usually a bit of poker there of an evening—but I haven't enough luck to sit in with them. My people, back in London, have a horror of debt—an' I fancy I inherit it. I play up to the amount of my spare cash when I'm willing to spend it that way—but after that's gone, I drop out."

"Is Brompton lucky?"

"Why, as to that, sir—I'd say his luck varies with the way he happens to feel. A month ago he was several hundred pounds to the good—but he's dropped most of it the last few nights."

"Hmph! If he won anything from Tom Coffin, it was because Tom made him a present of it. He's one of the best men we've got—steady, efficient, keeps his head all the time. But he came around to Frisco on a whaler from Nantucket, as a boy, and punched cattle all along back of the Coast for nearly twenty years. I've played cards, some—well enough to get every cent

that Brompton'll make in the next ten. But Tom Coffin would have my 'B. V. D's' in just about three jackpots—that's the sort of player he is. . . . Fred—some one dropped a remark to me that you had a notion of resigning, just before we came back? What was the idea?"

"Well, sir, I don't know that I can explain very clearly why I wished to do that—there were really several reasons. You see, the general situation up here changed a bit after you and Lady Boss went away. Originally, you may remember, Brompton and I were sent here at the request of two Hongkong friends who were among the largest shareholders in the syndicate—friends of our families. Sent up as 'resident engineers' in charge of the concession. When you came along and showed us your credentials as 'chief,' of course there was no argument. We agreed to work under you—liked to do so—recognized the fact that you'd had vastly more experience than either of us, especially in the political end, though Brompton had been in sole charge of two important works before we came here. To be sure, we were a bit disappointed—as we'd supposed that we'd be in authority on this work. At all events, when construction was finished and you'd gone home, it seemed to us that it restored the original status—and our Hongkong friends reinstated Brompton as chief, with me under him. We rather anticipated some objection from McClintock and Frayne, but more especially from Collins. He turned up a couple of weeks later—said if our Hongkong friends wished to assume the responsibility of putting us in charge, it was all the same to him. He said the other men would work under us as long as they were needed, without objecting—"

"Had either of you known Dave Collins better, that should have made you sit up all night—every night—just to be damn' sure that nothing happened to the plant! He's lived in Asia thirty years—they've never yet put anything over on Dave and gotten away with it very far! Of course Dave didn't anticipate any such catastrophe as that dynamiting, or he wouldn't have left you in charge a minute. In fact, he knew there was no chance for anything like that except through gross negligence somewhere—to put it mildly. Well, as I understand it now, Brompton was in sole charge when it happened? None of the other men told me that!"

"You mean, sir, that neither Frayne nor McClintock told you—to shift the responsibility from their shoulders?"

"Not a word! This is the first I've heard of it. Dave wouldn't, because he knew he didn't have to. You see, the fact was bound to come out—no concealing it."

"My word! That's what I call mighty decent of all three, sir!"

"After working with them three years, you should have expected that of them, Fred. Well—let's get down to the actual lay-out. Collins was in Saigon, I know. Where was Billy—McClintock—Brompton?"

"Frayne went down as far as Hanoi with Collins—they were to have a conference with the Governor, and Frayne was to get figures on the rice-crop. Wu-Pei-Foh had sent for McClintock to inspect the canals we built down through his province. I was at the lower end of the district conferring with three of the planters about enlarging some of their canals—and Brompton was here in camp when I left. We noticed that the water seemed to be getting steadily lower at the farther end of the concession, but supposed they had temporarily shut the sluices at the dam, for repairs—it was four days before I got back."

"That fact completely exonerates you, Fred—if those planters testify you were with them, as of course they would! So—why the idea of your resigning? Eh? Feared any statement you might be asked to make would reflect upon your friend and superior, who was in charge? Eh? Wanted to get away before any such question could be asked?"

"Well—I don't see how you guessed, sir—but that was about it. Of course, Brompton was no more to blame than I—but I'd rather not have been the one to say he was alone here in camp—in sole charge."

"I understand that perfectly, Fred. Well—there's no reason whatever for your resigning, and I wouldn't consider such a thing at present, anyhow. But really, old chap—if you'll look about more closely, you'll find there aren't as many spare hours on this job as you think!"

MEANWHILE, Bruce McClintock and Billy Frayne having gone off to their own bungalow, Joan was examining, in the living-room, some photographs she had

made of the wreckage resulting from the various explosions. The prints indicated that there must have been seven or eight—placed at points where they would do the greatest damage and indicating that the dynamite had been used by some man or men perfectly familiar with the whole construction. While she was examining these with a magnifying-glass, Lem Sing came in from his kitchen-shack in the rear and laid a crumpled, rather soiled letter on the table. During Brompton's occupancy of the bungalow as chief, Lem Sing had cooked for him as he had for the Grigsbys, but by no means as appetizingly—Brompton being of the "nigger-kicking" class who treat the colored races as animals rather than fellow humans.

"What's this, Lem?"—taking the letter from its envelope. "Why, it is addressed to Mr. Brompton—a personal letter! I can't read it! People don't do that sort of thing." The Oriental's features were masklike as usual—but the eyes were both pleading and insistent.

"You lead um, Missy Boss. Mebbeso catchee what happen this side when blig dam go bang, chop-chop. You lead um! Lem Sing catchee on floor one time!"

THE letter was from the French engineer, Deschanel, who had volunteered to come up-country with the two Englishmen, and very nearly let the company in for a contract which would have tied up its operations in endless litigation—the man whom Grigsby had promptly sent back to Hanoi on the plane which had brought them up. Apparently, Brompton had been playing cards not only with Deschanel after they arrived in camp but also with some of his friends in Hanoi, at one of the clubs, before they came up—losing an amount of money far beyond his resources. The letter made it plain that there was talk of posting Brompton as a welsher, not only in Hanoi but in Hongkong as well—unless those "debts of honor" were paid at once. In concluding, Deschanel said that if the engineer found it impossible to do this, it was advisable that he drop everything and run down to Hanoi by the first train leaving the railway terminus, eighty miles away—implying that if he did this, possibly some arrangement might be made for hushing the matter up and giving him an extension of time. Joan read the letter through—twice—then looked up at the impassive Chinaman, some com-

prehension filtering through her mind as to what might have happened.

"Lem—was Mr. Brompton here in camp when the dam was blown up?"

"Nope. Him catchee fliv one time—lide along to lailway—go b'low-side—Hanoi. Dam blow aftel two day."

She tore up the envelope and burned it in the fireplace—leaving the crumpled letter on the table.

"Go find Mr. Brompton, wherever he is! Tell him I want to see him right away—say it's an important matter."

IN fifteen minutes Brompton came hurrying up the veranda steps and walked into the living-room—where Joan received him smilingly, motioned him to a chair and told him to load up his pipe.

"Brompton—we've had no time as yet to sift this dynamiting and fix the responsibility, but we've picked up a few threads and I think we are gradually getting a comprehensive idea. I didn't know until this evening that you were appointed chief after we left and had been living here in the headquarters bungalow—nothing was said to us about that. In fact, I don't think John knows it yet. Well—this scrap of paper was found lying in one of the corners. You know how one unconsciously glances through anything of the sort, first, and discovers afterward that he or she was not supposed to have done so. Having read it, however, there's no getting away from the fact that it has a direct bearing upon what happened here. I find that you acted upon the suggestion and did go down to Hanoi two days before the dynamiting—returning three days after. You alone of the whole staff were in charge—none but foremen and coolies left on the job when you went down to Hanoi.

"Now—of course, allowance must be made for the fact that construction had been completed—that, apparently, there was no reason for anticipating serious trouble or tampering with it—canals all full. planters paying their water-rents, nothing but routine work in caring for the whole project. Also, from this letter, it is clear that through your liking for gambling you had gotten yourself into a frightfully unpleasant position—though I know that the whole thing was a plant and that you were undoubtedly cheated every time you played with that crowd! They brought pressure to bear upon you which was pretty difficult to resist—but there was no excuse

for your not calling in one of the other engineers and leaving him in charge while you were gone! The whole game, naturally, was to get you away from here for a few days when no other responsible member of the staff was around; and it worked—gave them all the opportunity they wanted to sneak a gang in here at night and plant that dynamite anywhere they pleased. I even doubt if you had placed watchmen on the dam and around the lake! Did Deschanel do as he hinted—get you out of the scrape without publicity?"

"Aye—and I'm now convinced that the chief did the man an injustice right at the start! Deschanel appears to me both decent and honest. He said a few hundreds more would make little difference in what I owed—and loaned me five hundred pounds to play at the Club, that night. Well—the luck turned. I won enough to pay off every penny I owed. The next day I won six hundred pounds more—came back up here with it—the slate wiped clean—"

"Oh — you — poor — brainless — fool! Your going down to Hanoi when you were in charge, here, was bad enough—though perfectly comprehensible in the circumstances. And though you were bound to be censured for it, the fact of your being down there exonerated you from any accusation of complicity in the dynamiting. But you hadn't sense enough to avoid walking right into a far worse net with your eyes open—when you should have been more on your guard than ever! Can't you see the inference—when every man in camp must know that you came back loaded with money! More money than you'd had in the last three years! If any charge is brought by us against Deschanel and his crowd, they'll flatly deny it—and say you were known to leave for camp after being seen coming out of a certain house with your pockets full of money! The men here in camp corroborate the fact of your having it. And that puts the responsibility for the dynamiting straight up to you, Brompton! Well—neither the chief nor I believe you were disloyal in any way but leaving camp when you should have stayed, Brompton—but stupidity is often worse than actual criminality, particularly in the case of such a proposition as this irrigation project. No use, man—you simply can't stay on the job—it's too risky! Write out your resignation on that

company letter-head, and go down to the Coast within a day or two—at your convenience."

Brompton was as obstinate as a mule—entirely failed to grasp the predicament in which he had placed himself.

"Oh, I say now, Mrs. Grigsby! That's coming it a bit thick, don't you think? What? Suppose I refuse to resign? Our friends on the Board in Hongkong will have something to say about it, you know!"

Her eyes were fairly blazing.

"I hadn't thought of giving them all the facts, Brompton—unless you provoke me too far! Suit yourself! I think it will be advisable, perhaps, if you leave camp early tomorrow morning."

THIS, of course, cleared up the whole mystery of the dynamiting so that further investigation would have been a waste of time. There was no point—nothing to be gained—in trying to ferret out the identity of the colonial engineer and coolies who had sneaked in through the concession under cover of the darkness to place and explode the dynamite. Circumstantial evidence pointed to Deschanel, but there was no proof whatever and not the slightest use in attempting to prosecute him.

Reconstruction began immediately. With the astute Dave Collins looking after the company's interests along the coasts, and John Grigsby keeping himself informed of everything that went on within a hundred-mile radius, several attempts to destroy masonry, canals and materials only resulted in some loss of life and serious enough injuries to prevent other conspirators from tackling anything of the sort again. But the vigilance was not relaxed for a moment. For months, nothing would happen; then, like rain from a clear sky, there would be an attempt to catch them napping. Every man on the job had tempting sums of money offered to him in one way or another—and it was the joke of the camp that a monthly fifty thousand francs—four thousand Hongkong dollars in straight-out graft—would have made them immune from any interference whatever, so low had expectation dropped in Hanoi as to what might still be gotten out of the concession for the needy. And then—with completion of the work and resumption of business fairly in sight, Grigsby suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, one morning.

HE had been going down the irrigated district nine miles for a conference with the planters, Lafourche and Mermet—riding along a road through the woods skirting the eastern boundary. Tom Coffin, the concrete boss, was overseeing a gang six miles from the camp, and reported by telephone that the Chief had pulled up to chat with him about nine o'clock. Lafourche called up at noon to ask when he might be expected to arrive. Billy Frayne, at the camp, phoned Coffin to saddle up and ride along the road to see if Grigsby had been hurt. He reported finding traces of a struggle, in the soft clay—apparently between four mounted men, some of whom had left a slight trail of blood. Joan came in as Frayne was rushing out to get Bruce McClintock and head a search or rescue-party for the beloved chief.

"With John in their power, Billy, those scoundrels undoubtedly will attempt some devilment tonight or tomorrow night—they'll count upon your calling out every available man to search for John. You and Bruce must stay right here to see they don't get away with it! Call in Fred Heathcote, wherever he is, to go with me! Have my pinto mare saddled!"

"BUT, see here, Lady Boss—do you think we'll let you go off by yourself, with only Heathcote, to be nabbed by that gang!"

"Sure do, Billy—bless you! I know exactly what I'm about! John has told me several times that Tribaut is unquestionably the leader in this part of the country—so influential that anything he says, goes. Well—Fred and I can reach Tribaut's bungalow in something over three hours. If we're not back with John in time for dinner, you can send Tom Coffin down, and start him from there!"

It seemed utterly preposterous to Fred Heathcote that the chief's wife should be permitted to visit a scoundrel as unscrupulous as Tribaut was said to be, with no other escort than himself—he didn't see how he could be of much use to her if they were overpowered by superior numbers. But to the end of his days he will never forget that interview with the suave and dangerous colonial planter when they walked into the living-room of his bungalow and found him playing *écarté* with two other rice-growers whose looks were against them:

Pulling up a chair six feet away from

the table, she seated herself—swung one booted leg over the other, and calmly lighted a cigarette. As their glances traveled admiringly from the hand which held it to the other, they were stunned to see an army automatic in it. They could have sworn there was no pistol there a second before—and it suddenly recalled what they knew of her marksmanship.

"Tribaut—you are going to send one of your friends for John Grigsby and bring him here within one hour—alive and uninjured. If you don't, I mean to kill you and the other man at my leisure—the first six shots won't be fatal ones. Even firing through one of these windows or doors, none of your fellow-scoundrels can kill me before I get you. I'm in cold earnest, you comprehend. Now—send for my husband!"

Heathcote was standing in a corner where he commanded the doors and windows. Joan's reputation had been growing, throughout the colonies, for more than four years—they knew she would do exactly what she said, and that two of the three, unquestionably, were due for a lingering and painful death if the engineer wasn't produced.

So they yielded. It meant riding at a tearing gallop to the shack where Grigsby was then lying, bound and gagged, on some filthy straw—but they just managed to get him back within the hour. Handing him the spare gun which Heathcote had fetched along for him, they made Tribaut and his companions mount and ride ahead of them until they met Coffin at the head of a dozen men coming down the road—after which, the planters were released. Grigsby said he had been shot from ambush—the bullet creasing his scalp and stunning him long enough for the four to pile on top of him. It was a sober-faced crowd of men who met them as they rode into camp—but they howled themselves hoarse in another moment!

SO—the work was finished—water again filled the canals. The hoodoo of Feng Hsu was again scotched—and this time the staff in charge had learned their lesson. When the Grigsbys reached Hong-kong, on their way home, they found themselves celebrities—fêted, until there seemed to be no escape from the attentions showered upon them. But one day they slipped out on a Vancouver-bound cargo-boat, once more homeward bound.



The Blue-Eyed Chink

There's a curious attraction about the mysterious ways of the Chinese in America—as witness this fine story of strange events down in Nogales.

By WILBER WHEELER

DARK ways and vain tricks were freely used in the feud that involved the Blue-eyed Chink.

The war that was waged by an entire *tong* against the charmed life of said Chink had proved a tough proposition. Apparently it had affected not at all the calm and crafty one himself. The Sing Fu Gees had been forced to take a breathing-spell on the Mexican side of the Line and talk the matter over. While they talked, the residents of the Arizona side drew a sigh of relief, but they also watched and waited. And the quiet interval gave the Border Patrol opportunity to reload its guns and wonder when the *tong* men would begin again their warfare.

For more months than the Chinese colony of Nogales, Mexico, could with equanimity remember, the weird-eyed one—legally known as Hang Far Low—had wielded his wicked will on them. With far more pleasure than his wooden face could show, he had squeezed a golden stream from the pockets of his countrymen. It was his price of silence in regard to those many matters which must of neces-

sity be kept very secret if the Chinese population of Mexican Nogales was to profit by their propinquity to American Nogales and in some mysterious way the Blue-eyed Chink had tapped the source of a tremendous amount of information concerning the affairs of the border-line smugglers. If a pack-train of *mescal* or *tequila* or plain Mexican beer laboriously wound its way across the line by the light of the western stars, it was invariably seen by Hang Far Low if missed by the Border Patrol. If an invisible cargo of narcotics was borne across the border, or if a slant-eyed visitor eluded the immigration sleuths, the Blue-eyed Chink was sure to know all the details. If a bogus merchant or a spurious son managed to pass the Government inquisition, their friends and relatives were sure to hear about it every so often from the old supersleuth.

It was rumored, and believed in many quarters, that the old Chink's weird blue eye was responsible for the wicked work. No particular aspersion was cast upon his meek brown one, but that other—the strange, uncanny blue one—was the Evil

One's all-seeing own. He did, so the story goes, sit safely on the American side and stare for hours with the blue unblinking orb across the street into Mexico and see all that there transpired. When he turned that eye, as he did occasionally, on the Border Patrol quarters, he might have read the orders issued daily from that source. But that, of course, was never confirmed.

The Blue-eyed Chink was never caught dabbling in questionable operations himself. When anyone checked up, and there were plenty to do it, it was found that he attended strictly to the business of extracting a generous share of the golden harvest as a consideration for a silent tongue and an idle ink-brush.

MOREOVER, this heathen Chinese belonged to no society at all—protective, benevolent or otherwise. His family origin rested in an obscurity from which he had never sought to rescue it. It was quite proper, therefore, so ran popular opinion, that an individual possessed of such unusual vision and of so wide and varied a fund of knowledge of the inner affairs of his countrymen, and who used the same with so little discrimination, should be sent to that land from whence no embarrassing or vexatious secret has ever been known to return.

The fact that the Blue-eyed Chink was levying his tribute from the Sing Fu Gees with an indifference which included the protests of the *tong* president himself in San Francisco, gave weight to the general opinion that it was up to that organization to rid the Border of the scourge. This opinion was strengthened by the fact that the Sing Fu Gees had gained much reputation in the past for abating such nuisances. It seemed natural that an organization which had at one time or another humbled the fiercest of the fighting *tongs* along the Border should find little or no difficulty in executing the simple task of the earthly removal of a single Chink. No voice had been raised in protest, therefore, when the activities of the Sing Fu Gee warriors made it apparent that the sentence of death had been passed on the old man.

The local gunmen had met with but indifferent success in the enterprise, however, and the coffers of the Sing Fu Gees had been lowered to an appreciable degree during a campaign against the charmed life of Hang Far Low.

The first jar to the pride of the Sing Fu Gees was sustained when the final chapter of the old man's career was to have been written in the rear of his adobe hut.

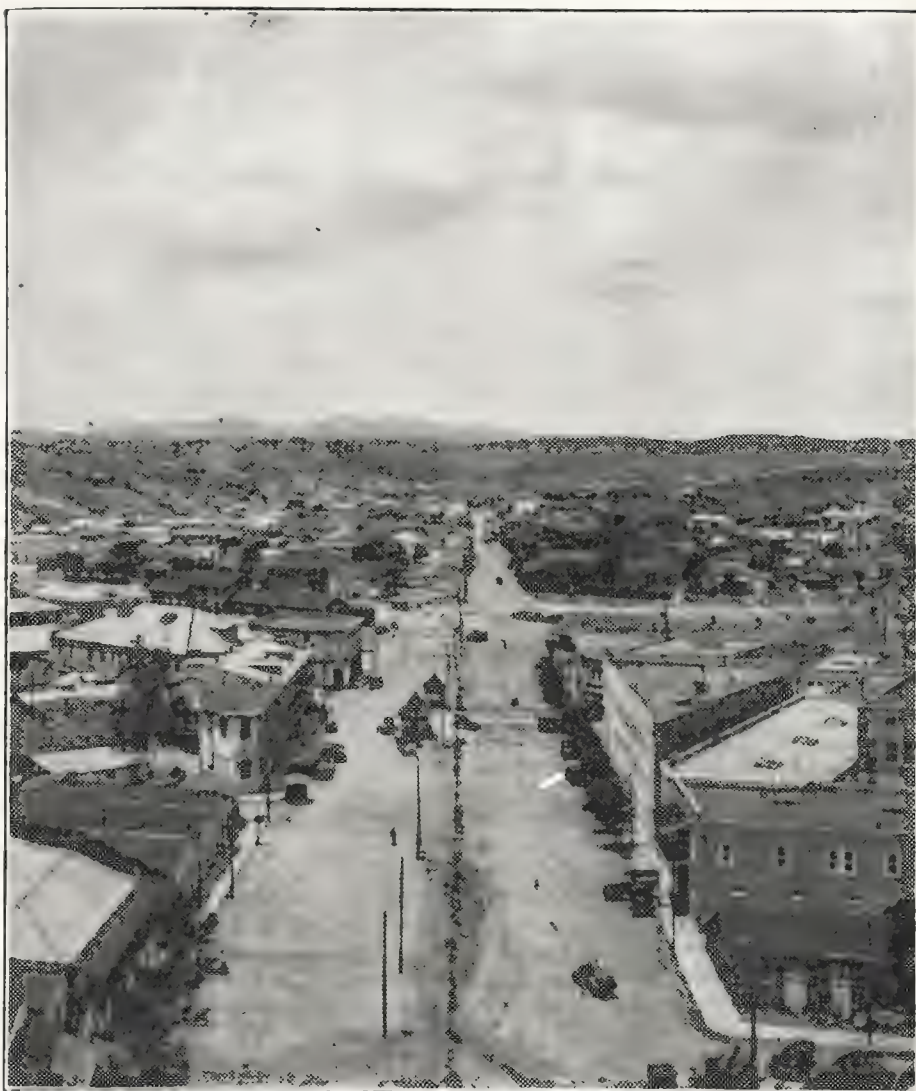
Of human weaknesses Hang Far Low apparently had none, unless one took note of his evident passion for the moonflower vines that clambered about the window at the rear of his hut. The Sing Fu Gees noted this, as they couldn't well afford to overlook a single bet. Moonflowers, it was argued, might be decorative to a high degree about an adobe window, but would serve as little protection against a well-directed fusillade.

As was becoming of the proprietor of a chop-suey joint who employed a cook and a waiter, Hang Far Low had adopted American garb. This had lent color to the theory that it would be a simple thing to pick him out when his time arrived to meet his ancestors in the other sphere. Curiously enough, however, within the day of his sentence, and for the first time in many moons, the condemned man had taken to the Oriental blouse and trousers, and the slippers and black felt hat of his race. This was an insignificant incident, agreed the hatchet-men, although it could not be denied that the change would render his identification more difficult when the psychological moment should arrive.

It had been arranged, therefore, to perform the last sad rites in a place where the executioners would be sure to find their man. The *tong* couldn't afford to linger long in the illegal sand on the Arizona side. They must needs work swift and sure, and hurry back across to the Mexican side. And Hang Far Low's joint was in painfully plain sight of the Border Patrol station. It was an annoying circumstance, with always one or more patrolmen on guard.

FOR a week after the condemnation, a saloon porch opposite the Blue-eyed Chink's joint had supported the inert body of a drowsy Chinaman who made even the peons feel virtuous in their languor as they dawdled along the street that formed the International boundary-line.

When the lazy Chinaman had apparently caught up quite nicely with his sleep, the victim's habits had been sufficiently observed to do him some detriment. Also it had been decided that three of the gunmen should step quietly across the boundary street at an hour when the moon and stars were lighting the Western world



Photograph by courtesy Southern Pacific Ry.

UNDER TWO FLAGS

THE scene of Mr. Wheeler's exciting story is one of the most peculiar and picturesque towns on this continent—Nogales of the famous international street, with the boundary-line running down the middle, one Nogales in Arizona, U. S. A., and the other in Sonora, Mexico. The combined population of these interesting twin upland cities is in the neighborhood of twenty thousand, and their unusual location gives them a specially cosmopolitan character.

and Hang Far Low was leaning out of his window to sprinkle his beloved moonflower vines.

Every night at a certain hour he watered this vine with its white, luminous blossoms. Well, he might as well die happy—it would be his last hour! It was calculated that immediately thereafter several hundred Chinamen and not a few Caucasians would breathe long and easy for the first time in many weeks.

THE plot had been carried out according to plans and specifications. But when the night strollers along International Street in the vicinity of Hang Far Low's hut had faded into the adjoining scenery, when the smoke and dust had cleared away and the Mexican and American limbs of the law had come together at a given point on an invisible line, the mutilated remains of an unknown Chinese were extricated from the moonflower vines.

It may be here remarked that men while engaged in the business of murder on the Border do not make it a practice of delaying their work to make a Bertillon examination of their subject. Least of all do they do this on moonlit evenings when one must take aim in one country at an object in another.

This carelessness as to details by the three gunmen cost the Sing Fu Gees a rather fat indemnity to the family, *tong* and creditors of the dead man, who was subsequently shown to have been a member in excellent standing of a rival and mighty clan. The departed may have been hired to attend the moonflower bower at that particular hour on that particular night, or he may have been a visitor who took this means of placating Hang Far Low as they endeavored to settle some trifling matter of the old man's devious affairs.

No one ever verified the details of the deceased's earthly departure, but the fact remained that this moonlight raid on the property of the Blue-eyed Chink not only proved an expensive undertaking for the *tong* but caused considerable acrimonious discussion between the head of the Border Patrol and the Mexican law-chief.

AND a second attempt on the life of Hang Far Low had had no happier ending.

As has been intimated, the old man had for months presided over the commercial destiny of a little chop-suey shop located

in the front of his little adobe hut. Supplies for this industry were carted at intervals by the proprietor himself from the express building opposite across the railroad tracks. The route from his shop to the express building could only be down International Street for half a block or via an alley at the rear.

But no interested person had ever been able to catch the old fellow as he traversed these two routes. He had baffled his watchers for weeks. It was one of the mysteries of his astounding career. He seemed to know by intuition, or some other kind of a hunch, when one of the routes was being watched; and when both were watched—he stayed at home. Perhaps his knowledge of this came from some of the manifold fountains of information whose waters he had quaffed so long, and so effectively.

At any rate, he had always contrived to be absent when these two routes were being watched, and he had an uncanny way of popping out at the front or back doors of his hut the very moment the vigil was relaxed. The proposition of intercepting him on the highway with a hatchet or a pistol had been given up as impracticable, with the American law so eternally vigilant and close at hand.

The "dark of the moon," however, had strengthened a hope in the collective breast of the Sing Fu Gees that a way would be opened to put an end to the spell which seemed to protect the much-wanted life. This hope had to do with that same window at the rear of the hut which was so beautifully festooned with the mass of moonflowers.

This scheme, however, was doomed to failure, for on the dark nights the selected victim elected to increase the darkness by retiring behind a strongly barred shutter. And when futile attempts had been made with a carpenter's auger to locate the position of the lock on the window, the efforts merely led to the discovery that the shutter behind which the wily one slept in serenity had been cannily reinforced with boiler plate.

It was the old man's custom, however, to do a little intensive labor in the middle of the day. On such occasions he would relieve his waiter at the cash-register behind the chop-suey counter.

All this had been carefully observed by the aforementioned lazy Chinaman when he was spotting for the Sing Fu Gees. It

had also been noted, reported and duly considered, that back of the counter and, what was more important, directly behind and not seven feet away from the high stool on which the waiter-cashier was wont to sit, a fair-sized window opened on a narrow passageway leading to the rear.

A stealthy dash across the Line, a steady hand, a narrow passage, a window and the back of Hang Far Low's head! Surely, argued the Sing Fu Gees, no situation could offer a more logical solution to a highbinder conspiracy. But it may here be observed, however, that logic is a science invented for things mundane and is not known to be efficient when applied to propositions of supernatural origin. So at least thought the Sing Fu Gees when the body of the victim had been extricated from the mess behind the counter of the chop-suey place by the ever-present Patrol.

When the clamor of at least two races had subsided somewhat along International Street, the Sing Fu Gees had sent a spy across the Line to the old man's shop to verify the amazing story that he was still alive. When the spy had reported that Hang Far Low, bland and smiling, still continued to do business in his chop-suey shop, the Sing Fu Gees decided to hold a meeting and discuss the matter.

TWO well-laid plans had ended in miserable failure. One heavy indemnity had been paid and another would shortly be due, owing and payable—and the Blue-eyed Chink allowed no period of grace beyond the date of payment!

There had been something unusually weird about this last affair. The plan had been carefully executed. The murderer had taken his place at the entrance of the passageway at the appointed time. The victim had in truth taken his seat at the cash-register as expected. The man who had been eating in the joint had made no suspicious move when he had finished his meal, had paid his bill to the man who was about to die, and departed. The gunman had hesitated not an instant when he had received the signal from the spotter, as he emerged from the restaurant, that the stage was set. And—the bullets had poured through the little window into the back and head of the man sitting at the cash-register.

Yet the Blue-eyed Chink had survived, while the body of his cashier-waiter lay stark and stiff at the undertaker's, with

no less than six gaping wounds in it.

Then a letter came for the Sing Fu Gees: "Brainless Ones," wrote their president from the San Francisco headquarters, "can it be true you have let that silly old fool outwit you again? Mullet! But he will die, if I have to go myself to this plagued place of Nogales, hunt him out myself and strangle him with my own hands. I have spoken, Spineless Ones. Act!"

"He bears a charmed life," replied the *tong* scribe. "He has a wicked blue eye which sees around corners, behind his back and through the covers of darkness. He is a disappearing fiend."

"You are cowardly fools," came from the president, "and frightened fish. He's no fiend. It was a chance happening. My own personal spy on the Arizona side reports that it is told on International Street by one who sat in the restaurant that Hang Far Low was called by a voice from the rear of the adobe building, and that the cashier-waiter took his place on the stool for the moment. It must have happened as our man went into the passage to the little window. This menace must be removed in the open street by the light of day. Are your fingers still so shaky that you cannot point a gun from the center of the street called International, and pull a deadly trigger? The Mexican and American authorities would quarrel over the responsibility for such a deed so long and so earnestly that it would provide a covering for your act. And the silly old worm will have departed. Report to me accordingly!"

It was assumed that after these two affairs that the Blue-eyed Chink would be on his guard. It also was assumed—with good reason—that he knew every man of enemy heart in both Arizona and Mexican Nogales, and would permit none of the local gunmen to approach him unguarded.

"The honorable one has spoken," replied the leader of the *tong*. "We will send to five cities and bring five strangers, each with courage and steady hand. One of them surely must find a way to reach past the guards of this Evil One."

ACCORDINGLY the strangers came from the five cities. None of them knew the Blue-eyed Chink. The old man knew not one of them.

Contrary to the expectations of the Sing Fu Gees, the object of their hatred

seemed oblivious to his supposed peril. He secured no guards; he apparently held no communication whatever with the Border Patrol; and as he seemed to have no business which took him from his shop, the problem of his elimination was no nearer a solution.

International Street, in the light of a blazing sun, in plain view of the law of two countries, did not offer a particularly attractive site for a murder. It was decided, nevertheless, in view of the unmistakable trend of the president's communication, to put the Blue-eyed Chink to rest as he engaged in his daily habit of smoking a siesta pipe at the hour of two P. M. at the entrance of his shop.

Hang Far Low's acquaintanceship with local celebrities of the gun and hatchet, and his familiarity with their affairs, had rendered him safe during these daily siestas from home-town talent. As the Chinese bad-man has never taken kindly to long-distance shooting, it was apparent that only a stranger could approach close enough to the victim to make sure the Chinese aim. It would mean again crossing the International boundary-line.

In the mid-Victorian era, before the Chinese pigtail lost its popularity to the more modern haircut, the usual technique of such proceedings was, other things being favorable, to grasp the victim by the queue and, holding him tightly in a convenient position, to place the end of a six-shooter in the small of his back or the pit of his stomach, and let the mechanism work as expeditiously as possible.

Modernity has its drawbacks—as the Sing Fu Gees could testify!

ON the day selected for the cancellation of the Blue-eyed Chink's account, a passer-by might have observed at the siesta hour in International Street an unusual number of sullen-looking Chinamen slouching about in saloon doorways on the Mexican side or walking carefully up and down the narrow, dusty thoroughfare. A strange similarity of garb might have been noted. The ordinary blue blouse and trousers, black hat and slippers, characterized each of them.

As the hands of the clock on the Border Patrol station neared the hour of two, the Blue-eyed Chink filled his pipe and sauntered to the door of his shop. If he noted the unusual appearance of the street, he showed no signs of it. The meek brown

eye was halfway closed, but the bright blue orb stared straight ahead, unblinking in the blaze of sun.

As he leaned back against the frame of the open door, crossed one foot over the other and applied the lighted match to the bowl, had he looked out of the corner of his meek brown eye, he might have seen a man rapidly cross the invisible boundary-line and step behind a jutting corner a few doors away. In a moment more, had the Blue-eyed Chink waited, he might have observed a stranger with blue blouse and trousers and black hat reappear leisurely around said corner and move rapidly in his direction.

One shot was fired.

When the Border Patrol and the Mexican police, astonished at the absence of scampering and running which usually attend these obsequies, rounded up and searched the twenty-odd men who quietly waited in International Street to be arrested, they found on each man a thirty-eight-caliber revolver, and in each weapon an empty shell. It is true that some of the guns seemed to respond to the smelling test; yet so bewildering had been the ease with which the crowd of possible murderers had submitted to arrest, that the test was applied too late to be of use.

The possible murderers were all dressed alike. Not one had tried to escape from either American or Mexican law. In fact, they all seemed to want to be arrested and looked stolidly on with infinite patience as the inevitable argument was waged by the limbs of the dual law as to who was responsible for this latest act of violence.

It was certain that only one had fired the shot. It was equally certain that that particular one would never be identified among the lot. After lengthy discussion and comparison, the only thing the two police reports could show was that Fat See, the peace-abiding chop-suey cook of one Hang Far Low, had stepped out of the door about two o'clock to enjoy a well-earned siesta, and immediately thereafter he had come to his death from a single shot from a thirty-eight-caliber revolver placed against his stomach by a passing and unknown man.

WHEN the Sing Fu Gees had partially recovered from the shock, they held another meeting and decided unanimously that the Blue-eyed Chink was not destined to die by gunshot wound.

No one could be blamed for this last hideous failure. It was discovered that their intended victim had left his post at the door and had retired inside his shop, passing his cook in the doorway with a pleasant word, just as the spotter had told the gunman from El Paso who lay in wait around the corner that he would find the man he wanted sitting by his doorway smoking a pipe, in the front of his shop.

It was a strange caprice of Fate, but entirely consistent with the other attempts on the life of the Blue-eyed Chink, that the murdered man should have stepped outside the door and seated himself just as the intended victim had retired from his post. The gunman from the Rio Grande city had but followed his instructions when he had killed the only man seated smoking by the front door of Hang Far Low's shop.

The Sing Fu Gees settled the damages, struck a balance on their books, sent the gunmen home to their five cities, and reluctantly submitted a report to their president.

They had almost become convinced that mortal weapon had not been invented that could snuff the life of this little old blue-eyed fox who still continued unharmed to minister unto his moonflower vines while the wailing of the women of three households were still echoing through Nogales.

About a week after the killing in International Street, the president of the Sing Fu Gees received an unexpected message at his headquarters in San Francisco. The message was on brown paper, laid on lightly with an ink-brush, and in effect it was that the president would learn something to his peace of mind if he would go in person to the shop of Hang Far Low, some thousand miles distant on the Mexican border line.

"May his quivering flesh lay stretched in jagged slices upon the torturing desert sands, and his head be impaled upon the prickly cacti!" cursed the president as he thumped upon his mahogany desk and pondered the irritating message. "Surely he plans some deviltry. And it is so unpleasant on the desert. Yet I will go. Mayhap some good will come of it. Perchance I may find opportunity to strangle him where he sits—the yellow insect!"

NUMBERS of California residents make the warm, thousand-mile journey to the border town of Nogales and consider such a trip a privilege. But the president

of the Sing Fu Gees could not, strictly speaking, be numbered with such pilgrims. Neither the scenery enroute nor the cool legal drink at the end of the road intrigued the harried president. Hence his mental status when he finally arrived at his desert destination and found the Blue-eyed Chink in his shop.

"Be seated, my distinguished guest," said the elusive one, motioning his visitor to an empty cracker-box. "Repose thy bones and let us drink our health in this *mescal* which found its way into my humble abode last night by the light of the midnight moon. Personally, my own health is a thing to marvel at—" His words trailed maddeningly into his glass as he lifted the liquor to his lips.

"May your body be cut in seven parts and buried in the soil of seven different nations," was the cheerful rejoinder. "And may your skull be ground to powder and strewn upon the sands."

Hang Far Low's strange blue eye stared straight at the president, but his brown one twinkled as it deliberately winked out of the window where hung the moonflower vines.

"You are unduly severe, most illustrious one, in your judgment of one who would do you a service. Gaze upon this," said the old man, and held out a long slip of green paper.

THE president examined the paper narrowly. It was a railroad ticket from Nogales, Arizona, to Low Tide, a beach village in the state of Maine. A gleam of triumph came into the eyes of the high-binder chief.

"So," he said sarcastically, handing back the slip, "the bullets of the Sing Fu Gees are singing too close to your head."

"It may as well be so," answered the blue-eyed one. "I do not fear your killers. They are infantile in their guile. I bear you no ill will, however, and I would therefore do you a service. Let it go abroad that the Blue-eyed Chink was spoken to by the distinguished president of the Sing Fu Gees. When I have gone into the land of the rising sun, it will be thought that I ran away. Your reputation will then be great all along the border. It will be good for you. Is it so?"

The president's fingers shook as he took from between his lips and regarded thoughtfully the golden tip of his cigarette.

"Your talk is strange," said he in a purr that held a scratch. "Your heart has changed toward me oversoon. I doubt not that you plan some foul scheme. But look into my heart and see if I am a fool, O thou of the wicked sight!"

"That dirty dig, as the Caucasian speaks it," responded the host, "is no doubt directed at my ill-mated optics. That being so, and while your mind is upon the subject, tell me, O great and learned one, what is the price you would put on one of your eyes?"

"Let us not talk the talk of fools," said the president impatiently. "I came not here, one thousand miles, for that!"

"See this," continued Hang Far Low, and he held out in his talons the artificial eye that had rested a moment before in its fleshy socket. "See!"

"See? Yes, I see," answered the other, his placidity masking a mixture of triumph, relief and scorn. "We have known always it was but an ordinary piece of blue and white glass."

HANG FAR LOW generously passed this by with but a slightly facetious shrug of his bony shoulders.

"In a low place on the high seas once," continued the old heathen, indicating the place which had once contained a brown eye and more recently an artificial blue one, "that space was made vacant by a pistol bullet. Do you not remember me?"

"Yes, I recall the incident now," admitted the president. "You were shot by accident in the steerage of a ship en route to San Francisco from our own cherished land, while a little matter was being settled by two members of the Sing Fu Gee *tong*."

"You recall then that I made a claim for damages?"

"Surely it was so," answered the highbinder. "But you asked too much. Your claim was denied by the Sing Fu Gee Council."

"My claim was just—"

"I have spoken—the matter is closed!"

"I say the claim was just," insisted the old man with an edge on his tone which kept the president silent. "It was a large amount, I know, but the loss of the eye barred me forever from the port of San Francisco, and I was returned in disgrace to the land of my fathers. Six months of effort sufficed me to get from China to a port in Mexico. Here, I have proved, with

special permission from the honorable Washington, that I am able to make a living in this America of his, before I go farther in. My time is up—and I have proved it, have I not?"

"May crabs claw off thy tongue—" commenced the president, but he was rudely interrupted.

"I ask you again," said the old man with steel in his voice. "What say you now is the price of an eye?"

THE president considered the question for a moment. His mind had been clouded by hatred, envy and prejudice. But the chief of the Sing Fu Gee *tong* was no fool. He looked at his one-eyed inquisitor with surprising tolerance.

"Thy eye to me has no value," he said slowly. "I say that its owner alone may set its price."

"Your fame for wisdom," said the old Chink, "has rested on a rock foundation. You have spoken as I spoke these many months ago. I have been called a thief. I have been considered without honor. When the Council sent me their ultimate message, and the American immigration consequently barred me, and I was returned to China without friends and without money, I placed a value on the eye which had been destroyed. It has taken me many days, my desired friend, to recover the value I placed on my eye. This void is paid for,"—he tapped the empty socket,— "and when I arrive at the coveted Eastern Coast, I will have it filled with a brown one—in this place they had only the blue one. You have heard. Is it not wise, and will you not benefit by my decision? Are we friends?"

The wizened little figure stood up and extended a bony hand.

"Some day I will tell your story," said the highbinder chief, arising from his cracker-box and enveloping the little paw in his own fat palm. "But not now. The reputation of the Sing Fu Gees has suffered too much. If you allow it, we are friends."

The two men smiled, and in the seclusion of the little adobe hut the suave president of the powerful Sing Fu Gees and the little old Chink pledged their friendship fondly in smuggled *mescal*, while the latter confided:

"I am told that the coast of this far-off Maine is a magnificent spot for the moonflower growth!"



Bennington's Birds

Did you ever raise chickens or take a small boy to keep over the summer? Bennington did both. Read what happened to him.

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

"I DON'T know, my dear, but we're doing wrong not to have Walter come back to us, here at Idlewilde," remarked Beatrice Bennington at breakfast, that fine morning of late September. She referred to one Walter McCaffrey, alias "Squiffy," who,—taken to live with them last year, from the Sheltering Arms,—had nearly disrupted the place. "Such a pitiful letter as he's written me, my love!"

"Pitiful fiddlesticks!" retorted Bartholomew, with great indignation. Memories of severe outrages that he had suffered at Walter's juvenile hands still deeply rankled—especially damages Bartholomew had been obliged to pay for destruction wrought by Squiffy among the Hayton poultry. "That young fiend, that immature but incarnate demon, never shall return. Not while I'm alive! Never, you hear?"

"But just listen to this, hon," the comely Beatrice entreated. "I'm sure it would melt a heart of stone." And she read aloud:

"Dear Friends:

"I want to come back, right away. Please read this letter before you read the

Charter. Every day and night I cry to come back to your dog, Sam, and you.'"

"Sam's dead," interrupted Bartholomew; "and if Squiffy wants to see him in the Great Beyond, I might assist him!"

"You're horrid, love. Do listen:

"If you will let me come back right away, I will do everything you ask me without making a fuss. I have packed a pillow-case with my nightshirt, hairbrush, comb, magazine, book and razor, so I can skin out quick and come back to you.'"

"Razor!" Bennington ejaculated. "So the young ghoul has a razor now, eh? To cut our throats with, most likely!"

"Don't be so harsh, Barty. Isn't this just too pitiful, now?"

"They try to teach me French, but I can't learn it. Please send me a letter telling me I can come back right away. Gee, if I can't, I don't know what I will do. When you send the letter, be sure to send me money enough for my train fare. Write and tell me I can come back as soon as you get this letter. The principal is supposed to read each letter every boy writes, but a friend of mine is going to sneak this out.

I sleep between the mattresses and one blanket on top of me. I have a very bad cold. Please let me come back, right away!— With love, your affectionate— Walter.”

“Maybe his cold will develop into pneumonia,” suggested Bartholomew hopefully.

“And do listen to the P. S.,” his wife entreated. “It’s just wonderful!”

“I will get up *good*, every day, and not sauce you once. I will stop smoking and swearing and building fires in the garage and everything I did, if you will let me come back right away. If you will let me come back, I will sing in the choir and earn money for you, if you will let me come back right away.”

“I GATHER that Squiffy wants to come back, right away,” judged Bennington. “Well, you write him, right away, and tell him he can’t. C-a-n’t, *can’t*!”

“You haven’t heard his Charter, dear!”

“Charter. Things I wont do, if I can come back, and things I will do: I wont swear, smoke, sauce you, fight, pull out Sam’s hair, ask for money, skin out at night, kill chickens, go with bad boys, be a bandit, sell spare tires and tools off your car. Gee, I don’t like this school; the food is rotten. If I can’t come back, anyhow send me a good fat chicken for Easter.”

“I’ll chicken him, if that young Beelzebub ever shows up here again!” Barty menaced. “He’d better try it, once!”

“There’s some more to the Charter, love:

“Things I will do. I will obey, cut wood, fix furnace, stop putting mice in your cook’s teapot, sweep cellar, help your hired man instead of putting tacks in his bed, get my lessons, go with good boys, behave myself. I promise on my honor to do all these things if you will only let me come back, right away.”

“The said hired man, Suoma Lynen, has a rawhide ready for him,” remarked Bennington. “And Suoma is one of the strongest Finns I’ve ever known. Only for the fact that Squiffy would probably burn the house, if Suoma ever licked him, I don’t know but I might consider it. On the whole, however, it’s thumbs down for Squiffy!”

“I want to come back, right away,” Beatrice continued reading. “I realize what good, kind friends you were to me, and I want to come back and be kind to Sam and you. Please let me come back, right away. Gee, I cry for Sam and you,

all the time. Dear Sam, I hope you miss me as much as I miss you. I hope the Benningtons give *you* three square meals a day. Dear friends, I realize how much you did for me, and I want to come back right away and repay you for being so good, by being kind to you and doing what you ask me to. I realize you have not many more years to live, and I want to be with you, those years!”

“Not many more years to live, eh?” Bennington demanded. “*He* wont have many more minutes to live, if Suoma or I ever get a hand on him again!” Bennington clenched his fists and looked almost formidable. His wife sighed as she laid down the letter:

“Poor little fellow! We may have misjudged him, after all. In spite of everything, he may have been innocent.”

“Innocent!” Bartholomew glared through his shell-rimmed goggles. “That black-hearted monster!”

“I know appearances were against him, dear, but much of the evidence was only circumstantial.”

“Never mind! No human being could even *look* as guilty as he looked, and not *be* guilty. And didn’t we actually find him making Selectman Ketcham’s hens drunk, and playing they were pinwheels and rockets? Now that we’ve got a fine flock of prize Buff Orpingtons here at Idlewilde, d’you suppose I’d take any chances? There’s been trouble enough this spring with chicken-thieves round here, as it is, without importing a regular chicken-murderer! Say no more about it, Beatrice; say no more!”

With great dignity Bartholomew arose from the breakfast-table, and made ready for his weekly business-trip to Boston.

“That Satan’s limb!” he growled, as he walked to the depot. “Innocent, indeed! Why, men have been hanged on half the evidence against that ghoul. I’d like to see him coming back!”

ON the eight-forty-seven to Boston he met Ed Parvin in the smoker, and they fell to talking about chickens, as suburbanites will do betimes, if not restrained. Parvin had a loss to report.

“Somebody got into my best pen, last night,” said he, “and copped more than a dozen of my big Plymouth Rocks.”

“Maybe you left your henhouse door open, and they went home,” suggested Barty.

"Stop your kidding! I never carried a crateful of prize poultry to Brockton Fair, anyhow, like you did last year, and let 'em jolt out of the car—smash the crate and have to chase chickens in heavy traffic on Main Street!"

"Perhaps not," Bartholomew retorted caustically. "But I caught some o' my chickens; and from all reports you don't have much luck catching the kind you chase!"

"I was robbed; that's what," Parvin retorted. "Chicken-thieves have been mighty active all over this county, the past month, and some of 'em got to me, that's all."

"Well, they'd better not get to *me*! Next to a skunk, a chicken-thief is the meanest varmint alive. And I'd just as soon shoot one as a skunk, any day."

"Same here. If we could shoot one or two, we could maybe collect that Poultry Breeders' Association reward of one hundred dollars a head for thieves. But the trouble is to get near enough to 'em to shoot. They seem like a well-organized gang. Travel in high-powered cars, with gunnysacks and chicken-crates, gather in the birds and make their get-away, P. D. Q. With broilers at forty cents a pound, and old birds bringing up to one dollar and fifty cents apiece, there's corking money in it, for them."

"It's not all velvet, though," cut in Russell Farnum, from across the aisle. "Up to old lady McIntyre's, the other night, they dropped a pocketbook in the henhouse. There was four hundred and twenty-seven dollars in it, cold cash. As it's a cinch they'll never come back, the old lady sold nineteen birds for four hundred and twenty-seven dollars, or at the rate of twenty-three dollars apiece. Not too bad, what?"

"Serves the thieves right!" growled Bartholomew. "And if we had any kind of a sheriff in this county, he'd put a stop to such depredations. But with a figurehead like old Hell-roaring Jake Purrington—all talk and no action—what can you expect? He couldn't even catch a cold! I opposed his election last time, and he knows why. I guess my article in the *Hayton Gazette* was an eyeful for him!"

"I guess so, too," Farnum agreed. "By all accounts he's sore as a scalded pup, at you. And after the run-in he had with the editor of the *Gazette* for printing it, the editor's sore at you too. If either of 'em ever get anything on you, Bennington—good-night!"

"That hick editor and that tin-star rube ever get anything on me?" demanded Bartholomew. "Say, you make me laugh!"

BARTHOLOMEW, however, did not laugh that night when he was awakened, about midnight, by a nudge in the ribs from Beatrice's plump elbow.

"Barty! There's somebody in our chicken-run!"

"*What?*" And he sat up in bed. "Chicken-thieves? Say, where's my revolver?"

"Be careful, Barty! Remember, there's capital punishment in this State, for murder. And your insurance-premium isn't paid. Go slow!"

"Go slow, nothing! There's a reward of one hundred dollars apiece for chicken-thieves, and I might as well clean up—beside saving my birds and teaching the thieves a good lesson. A chicken-thief's the meanest varmint alive, and I'd just as soon shoot a skunk as shoot one! Go slow? I guess not!"

He hustled out of bed with no visible intention whatever of going slow. Not that his courage was that of a lion; but the outrage of a foray on blooded birds will nerve even the most pacific of men to action. Besides, the robber might after all be only a fox or a "wood-pussy;" and if so, was not here a miraculous occasion to prove his valor to a wife who often had denied he had any?

Faint sounds of disturbance from the region of the chicken-run sped Barty's efforts. He sketchily hauled on such of his clothes as he could find without making a light, donning them over his pajamas, which bunched up mightily in the process; crammed his sockless feet into mismated shoes that he left unlaced; rummaged his revolver from a bureau drawer. Then, unheeding Beatrice's now half-hysterical plea that a husband was worth more to her than a few chickens, or even revenge on hen-thieves, he hastily groped downstairs.

He reached the back door after having—in the dark—fallen over only two rocking-chairs and Junior's express-wagon. Noiselessly opening that door, he listened, peered out into a chilly and drizzling obscurity. So great was his excitement that he quite forgot his revolver had never been loaded since the time of its purchase. His heart beat high—very high, indeed. His neck craned from his coat-collar like a turtle's from its shell.

What to do now? Bartholomew's courage seemed oozing a bit. A man may be bold as *D'Artagnan* in an upstairs bedroom, only to find his heroism slipping at a cold midnight back-door.

"Gosh, but it's ch-ch-chilly!" he remarked, chattering a little. He felt a draft down his neck and two on his bare ankles. His correspondence-course on "Development of Personal Bravery" had nothing whatever to say about chicken-pirates—presumably armed. Bartholomew wondered what he ought to do—charge the enemy, or, too proud to fight, feign to ignore them.

A MUFFLED cackle, and the glimpse of two vague shadows hastening toward the side road, steeled his resolution. Hot determination surged—and Bennington rushed forward, shouting in a shrill, thin pipe:

"Hey, you! Bring back those birds!"

The only result of this was a faintly derisive laugh, the growl of a motorcar as somebody stepped on the gas of an engine that had been left quietly running, a clash of gears. Bennington vaguely caught the suggestion of a car departing at considerable speed.

"Here, you—" But the miscreants totally declined to "here." And sudden silence closed on the drizzly, chill air.

Then rage filled Bartholomew Bennington's heart, inside his thirty-four-inch chest. Any householder, despoiled, will understand. Also, it's a good bit easier to feel rage when the foe runs away than when he stands to fight. Bartholomew ran from the house, shuffling a bit by reason of the unlaced and mismated shoes on the bare feet. He hastened in his assorted garments over his bunched-up pajamas, to the garage; and—stopping not even to investigate the extent of his loss—got busy with pursuit.

It was the work of a mere moment to jam the pistol into his pocket, fumble the garage-key from his clothes, slide back the door and throw on an old overcoat that hung near it, then jump into his car and fling the self-starter into action. As the engine barked and caught, Bennington felt a pang of regret that Suoma Lynen, the hired man, just happened to be absent. With the unemotional but heavy-fisted Suoma at his side, he would have had more stomach for a chicken-bandit chase. But Suoma or no Suoma, he was determined to run the miscreants down, recover his property—his prize Buff Orpingtons—and take vengeance dire.

For once in his very much married, his tame-rabbity, tea-and-toasty life, he felt the surgings of completely outraged manhood—"saw red," as the popular novelists say, knew he would do or die in the attempt.

As he switched on his lights and swung his car down the driveway, he heard the voice of Beatrice imploringly at the bedroom window:

"Barty, Barty! Be careful! Oh, what are you going to do? Don't kill 'em, Barty! I'd almost rather lose *all* our chickens than have you a murderer, or have you get killed. Remember you're a husband and father, Barty, and—"

Her appeals faded out as Bartholomew hurled his car forward. Only a grim laugh echoed back to the distraught Beatrice. What was prudence now? Despoiled, ravished of his precious birds, Bennington's jaw set hard on vengeance—also the one-hundred-dollar reward for each and every chicken-thief brought to justice.

Savagely he crammed his unlaced shoe on the accelerator. His car surged mightily forward, leaped away into the cold and drizzly night.

The chase was on!

VERY far ahead, down the long straight

State highway to the village, Bartholomew's eyes saw red, indeed—the red of a fleeing tail-light. He had, in his haste, omitted to put on his horn-rimmed spectacles; but being far-sighted, he could still do very well without them. Now he "took after" the bandit car at high and rising speed.

The highway spun in and in at him, a white ribbon here or there gleaming with little puddles. Forty, forty-five, fifty, the speedometer-needle registered. In his saner moments Bennington rarely ventured to drive over twenty-five; but now! Only one thought possessed him: to overtake the poultry-banditti. Just what he intended to do after that, did not concretely occur to him. Rage and a sense of justice, he felt, would find a way.

For a moment he exulted as, obviously, his car crawled up on the fugitives. But these low-browed persons must have discovered pursuit, for now their own car began to burn the road at a tremendous rate. Bartholomew found himself no longer gaining. As the bandits whirled through sleeping Hayton, they were plainly shaking him. He cramped the accelerator down hard, and

—a scant half-mile behind the fleeing poultry-pirates—roared like a vengeful tornado down the long, elm-arched street.

Now the village lay far behind; and now the fugitive gleam of red suddenly vanished, as the road forked to Porterville on the right and Maplewood on the left. Bennington's brakes squealed. He slowed at the fork. Which way now? Sherlock Holmes methods of the simplest showed him, in his headlight glare, fresh tire-tracks to the right. Again his car surged onward. Once more it leaped away, away, in pitiless pursuit. Vengeful at the wheel, Bennington crouched, staring with wide eyes, poison at his heart.

WERE not more urgent matters to be told, we might make Bartholomew's heroic ride, like Paul Revere's, last for several pages. But printing costs money, and so let us condense it to a mere synopsis. The bare facts—you can take them and pad them as fully as your imagination demands—will come to this: Bennington chased the chicken-pirates three-quarters of an hour and nearly thirty-six miles. His pursuit led through Porterville, Gordonton and Arline. Betimes he lost the trail; then, like a bloodhound of doom, picked it up again. Now he fell far behind, then surged close; and all the time he was chattering with an acute and growing chill from unprotected neck and ankles. If he had possessed any safety-pins he would have stopped long enough to pin up his collar and the bottom of his trousers; but safety-pins he had none. He mentally vowed that always thereafter he would carry safety-pins as standard equipment of the car.

Very, very chilled grew Bartholomew. For a rainy late September night in Massachusetts, around twelve to one A. M., can be and often is cold indeed.

The chase ended suddenly as it had begun. Even more so. For in a long stretch of road through dense woods, darker than the prospects of a grasshopper in a chicken-yard, Barty's straining eyes all at once beheld the mocking tail-light gleaming close.

He jammed in clutch and brake just in the nick of time to dodge hitting the bandit-car as it lolled half in the ditch and half across the road, with a blown rear tire.

His brakes shrilled; his car slewed perilously, slid, came to rest. Out of his pocket, with a trembling hand, he snatched the pistol.

"Hands up!" he shouted, scrambling from his car. His mouth felt dry and queer; his pulses were hammering, but still he held his nerve. "Stick 'em up, and be quick about it!"

No answer. Not even the stab of flame, the bark of a bandit gun. A complete and totally disconcerting silence greeted him. Where the fowl-buccaneers had vanished, who could tell? But it was a safe bet they had made tracks into the woods without stopping to try conclusions with their pursuer. No doubt they imagined at least a posse with rifles was after them. Didn't Shakespeare say something about conscience making cowards of even poultry-privateers? Or was it Tennyson? Never mind; anyhow, it's true.

A moment the staring Bartholomew stood all alone in the roadway, dark save for the headlights of the two cars. A moment silence reigned. But only for a moment. Because almost at once a cluck and cackle of birds recalled him to the fact of why he was there at all.

"My chickens!"

The words burst from Bennington with an extreme joyance.

"My birds! My Buff Orpingtons!"

Thank heaven, those at least remained. Bennington might be chilled to the marrow and might have risked life and limb by that wild ride, by possible fusillades; but his fowls were safe! The outlaws in their panic had abandoned all. Even though Bennington could not arrest the miscreants, here at least was partial victory.

He ran to the bandit car, dimly perceived in it a crate filled with poultry, lifted that crate out, and with it staggered back to his own machine.

Two minutes later he had swung about, and at a smart clip was headed for home. In his brain was the registration-number of the bird-brigands' car, and in his pocket lay the car's switch-key.

"Now they wont put on a spare tire and make their get-away—that's a cinch!" vengefully exulted Bartholomew. "And tomorrow the Law will have 'em—and I'll have my reward. I guess bird-burglars will monkey with *me*—I don't think!"

JOYFULLY cogitating, Bennington stepped on the gas for Idlewild. Not the least beatific of his reflections was realization that this exploit would thrill his Beatrice and cause her greatly to respect him. Yes, how could it help raising his

stock once more to par, with the good wife? That stock had long been on the decline; but now, now—ah!

Though not unduly athirst for praise, Bartholomew shared every married man's instinct occasionally to play the rôle of hero in his wife's eyes. He perceived with devastating clarity, which sorely galled him, that for years Beatrice had sized him up as a Number-Thirteen-collar man, that she had his number, and that this number was way down in the small fractions.

Well, now, for once here was the opportunity to pung and chow and be mah jongg all at one fell swoop. Bartholomew shoved his car along through Arline and toward Gordonville at a round pace. Already he was mentally living the scene, when he should arrive home in the darkness before dawn, haggard, spent, but triumphant.

"Oh, Barty, darling! Are you all right? Did they wound you, my hero?"

"Never touched me, my love! Half a dozen of them—big, husky ruffians in an immense car—attacked me. All gunmen. Chicken-corsairs, desperate characters! Desperate hand-to-hand conflict. They emptied their revolvers at me, but I drove them all off. Yes, I admit it was nip and tuck for a while. But in the end I downed them. They ran—carrying two desperately wounded fowl-freebooters. *They* wont rob any more hen-pens for a while. And yes, I recovered all our birds. Hero? Not at all, my love—only a husband, father and chicken-raiser defending his home. Only a *man*!"

Oh, it was sublime, delicious!

FROM this ecstatic reverie, through which now and then the crated birds clucked contentedly as if glad to be homeward bound again, Bartholomew was presently aroused by sight of a small and trudging figure in the road, a figure that his speeding headlights rapidly brought into proximity.

The figure turned, with coat-collar up and cap down, very plainly cold and wet. It began what is expressively known as "thumb-pointing," to indicate that a lift would be acceptable. Bennington slowed his car. He objected to thumb-pointers; but on a lonely road like this, at about one-thirty in the morning—and also because he saw the thumb-pointer was a mere youth—he felt disposed to make an exception.

"Jump in, and make it snappy!" he com-

manded as the car lagged almost to a halt. He swung the door wide. The youth, really only a boy, jumped in and slammed the door. Then as the machine gathered speed again, he began:

"Hello, sport! Gee, but it's a frost, aint it, hikin' this time o' night? You aint got much of a boat, but gee, anythin's better 'n nothin', and I aint p'ticular. Give us a match, will you? I'm dyin' for a smoke. I got the tacks, but no matches. What you got in back, there? Chickens? What are you, anyhow, a chicken-thief? How far is it to Hayton? That's where I'm goin'. Why'n't you give us a match? Gee, but you're slow!"

MEMORIES of other monologues quite in this vein swiftly recurred to Bartholomew. Absolutely thus, last year, did Walter McCaffrey, alias Squiffy, use to hold forth. A pang of uneasiness, like a thin and flying blade, pierced Barty's consciousness.

"What's your name?" he demanded sharply. "Where from, and where bound?"

"Gee, but you're noseey, aint you?" the lad retorted. "Besides bein' slow. I dunno as it's any o' your damn biz who I am, nor nothin'. Who're *you*? Mostly rum-runners an' chicken-thieves is out, this time o' night. Gee, you make me think of a guy I use to know at Hayton. A shrimp, he was, but his wife was the goods. Some pippin, I'll tell the world! He cruelized me, but she stuck up for me, she did. Gee, but he was the prize boob, an' then some! It's a shame to let 'em live, like that guy! An' gee—say, what you stoppin' for?"

Bennington jammed the car to a swift halt, and switched on the little dash-light. Only too horribly he recognized the caroty hair, freckles and flap-ears, the abhorred physiognomy, of Squiffy. Even that dim light revealed the demon-features with terrifying clarity.

"You—you!" gasped Bartholomew. "You young fiend!"

A moment the boy squinted wise, hard eyes at Bennington, then unlimbered:

"Hey, c'mon, now! Cut out the rough stuff, see? Gee, who's a fiend? Cut it out! I may be a fiend, but I aint no rum-runner or chicken-thief—not just now. Give us a match, you tightwad, can't you? I know *you*! You're that Bennington boob! Gee, what a rig you're in! You look like somepin the cat brought in. Say, start up this punk bus an' let's be gettin' along to

Idlewilde, see? How's your wife? She's O. K., fine an' dandy. How'n hell did she ever come to marry *you*? A peach! I don't like the Shelterin' Arms, see? I wrote your wife about it, an' after that, gee, I thought I wouldn't wait for no answer, so I just run away. I had my things in a pillow-case, but I got shootin' craps with some 'boes at a shanty, an' they gypped me out of 'em. But I burned up the shanty on 'em, anyhow. That's somepin!"

"Squiffy!" the outraged Bartholomew managed to stammer. "If you know what's good for you, you'll get out of this car while you're still alive!"

"Gee, is that so? Who's goin' to hurt me? *You* couldn't hurt a bug! Drive on! Why'n't you drive along home? If you can't, lemme at the wheel—I'll make the old bus go some! Say, you aint got nothin' to eat, have you? There's them chickens! Gimme a chicken, an' I'll roast it. I like to make fires, but gee, you gotta gimme a match. That'd be swell, roastin' a chicken in the road! You can have part, if I leave any. Where'd you pinch 'em? C'mon, get busy! Do somepin, can't you? Gimme a match or a chicken or a smoke, or shoot this punk old bus for home, or do *somepin*! Gee, what a dummy! I always thought you was nuts, an' now I know it, an'—"

"You get out o' this car!" The command burst all in one maddened gush from Bartholomew's outraged soul. Talk about seeing red! Bennington was beholding a whole tropical sunset over an erupting volcano. "You demon, you arch-fiend! Get out o' here, before I throw you out!"

"Gee, you wouldn't throw nothin', only bull," retorted Squiffy with utmost aplomb, leaning back in an attitude of greater ease. "Keep your shirt on—if you got one on, now, which you don't look like you had. Rum-runnin' and chicken-stealin' without a shirt on—some guy! Say, you're a false alarm, *you* are. All you talk is static, an' you got your ant-ennies crossed with the bug-house. Who's scared o' *you*?"

BARTHOLOMEW'S sole answer was to lay violent hands upon Squiffy and attempt to hurl him from the car.

It is not, however, easy to exert one's full strength—such as that may be—while seated in a motorcar. And Squiffy proved far tougher than any hard-boiled owl. Not only was he swift with left-hooks and up-percuts, but in clinging he had vines and lobsters completely outclassed.

Before Bartholomew could fling him to the roadside ditch, pinwheel-fashion, Bartholomew's overcoat-collar was extensively ripped, one sleeve torn almost completely off, right eye puffy and lip cut. Squiffy sat in the ditch, covered with mud but otherwise practically undamaged, and addressed Bennington with a complete fluency of imprecation that might make good reading, but that no censor would ever O. K.

Little mindful of these linguistic garnishments, just so that Squiffy remained outside the car, Bennington immediately drove on.

"That young demon!" he growled. "Just let him show his face in Hayton, if he thinks best! I'll have Sheriff Purrington arrest him on sight. And I'll get the Sheltering Arms on the long-distance and have 'em round him up in double-quick time. I'll show *him*, the monster!"

TWICE victorious over powers of evil in one night, merrily albeit shiveringly and hampered by his rent raiment and his personal injuries, Bartholomew drove homeward once more. Homeward, yes, but not for very long. Because after he had spun through Gordonton and had come within about a mile of Porterville on an easy upgrade, the engine coughed, sputtered, back-fired and died.

"Hello!" said Bennington. "What now?"

What now, very swiftly developed.

"Out o' gas, huh?" demanded Squiffy, sliding off the spare tire where with simian agility he had climbed and clung. "Gee, what a boob!" He came around close to Bennington, and stood there mockingly in the dim aura of light that reflected through the drizzle, from the headlights. "A guy that don't know enough not to run out o' gas—"

"Squiffy," articulated Bartholomew in a hard, tense voice, albeit a bit thickly by reason of his cut lip, "I am armed. I've got a revolver. Any ordinary man in my place would shoot you in your tracks and throw your carcass to the crows. But no, I'll spare you—on one condition. The next town is Porterville, about one mile ahead. Go there, rouse up the watchman at the only garage there—you can't miss it—and bring me five of gas. I'll not only spare your life, but I'll give you a dollar, and I wont send you back to the Sheltering Arms. I'll put you on a train for the Far West, Squiffy, and you can ride one dollar's worth in that direction. Get me?"

"Gee, sure I get you!" And Squiffy looked almost human. "You may not be such a punk guy, at that. Only a boob. Slip me the jack for the gas, sport, an' I'll get it. I'll wake the guy up if I have to set the place on fire to do it—but I got no match. Give us a match an' the jack! Slip me!"

"No matches, Squiffy! Only the money!"

But alas, Bartholomew failed utterly to discover any. There was no jack to be slipped. A thrice-over search of all his pockets revealed not above seventeen cents in chicken-feed. Realization of this horrendous catastrophe gave Bartholomew pause.

"Squiffy, I'm all out of change."

"You are, huh? Gee, but you're a swell guy, aint you? Can't even raise the price of a fill o' gas! Some Rockyfeller!"

"Have you got any money, Squiffy?"

"Gee, I got forty-two cents."

"That makes fifty-nine, between us. That's more than enough for two of gas, to get home on. I'll pay you your dollar, then. Run along, now, that's a good boy!"

"Gee! Nix on that! If you think I'm gonna slip you my kale, you got another think comin'!"

"I don't ask you to *give* it to me, Squiffy. Just lend it to me!"

"Nothin' stirrin'! I had to work too hard shootin' craps, for this here coin, to be lendin' it to a boob like you!"

"Squiffy, hand over that forty-two cents!"

"Ah, go to hell!"

BARTHOLOMEW made a quick exit from the car and essayed to seize the muddy and recalcitrant one; but without glasses, he misjudged distances. Also, he slipped in the mud, and took several minor damages. Squiffy faded into Stygian gloom, whence issued injurious remarks.

Baffled, Bennington pondered. His situation had now become painful in the very extreme, the more so as he realized his Beatrice would be worrying her head off at this long delay. He could picture her walking the floor, imagining him wounded, dying, maybe dead; and at the end doubtless calling up Hell-roaring Jake Purrington to get a posse out and scour the countryside for him. If Bennington were to save his face at all, every moment was now heavily freighted with necessities for quick action.

But what was to be done? How was he to get gas? Only one possibility remained.

Even as travelers across the steppes of Russia fling supernumerary infants to the wolves, for a getaway, so now Bennington understood he would have to sacrifice a few of his precious, prize Buff Orpingtons.

It took him not long to open the crate, in the darkness and extract four fine but vociferous birds, tie their legs with a cord rummaged from a side-pocket of the car, and start hiking toward Porterville. But all at once, as he bore his loud burden down the tenebrous road, doubts and fears assailed him. He had forgotten to take his switch-key. Moreover, in his absence this immature and vengeful demon of a Squiffy—even though he didn't run off with the car, altogether—might with the car's tools break up no end of the car's anatomy; or liberate all the remaining hens, wring their necks or otherwise indulge his childish fantasies. No, never must Squiffy be left alone there!

Bartholomew returned. Squiffy was already vastly at ease in the front seat, apparently master of nearly all he surveyed.

"Hello there, Squiffy?"

"Gee, whadju want now, you big stiff?"

"Come along with me to the garage, and I'll give you my seventeen cents."

"Gee, you're a high-payin' guy, aint you? I guess you're scared to walk there in the dark, alone. That's what. Well, I aint goin', anyhow. Walk a mile an' back for seventeen cents? I guess nix!"

"I'll give you my pocketknife, too."

"Gee, are you on the level? You aint tryin' to gyp me, nor nothin'?"

"On the level, Squiffy."

"Chuck in your watch an' cuff-buttons," bargained the hard-boiled one, "an' you're on."

"Sorry, but I haven't got my watch here, and I haven't any cuff-buttons, either."

"That's right. How could a guy without no shirt have cuff-buttons? Gee, some guy! Well, whadju got?"

"I've got a fountain-pen in my vest-pocket, and a ring."

"Di'mond?"

"No, but it's a very good seal-ring," replied the distressed Bartholomew. Better sacrifice anything than risk leaving that diabolical one with the car.

"Slip me!"

"No! I'll give you the ring, pen and money when we get back here with the gas."

"Noth-in' do-in'! I know *you*. Shell out!"

Bartholomew essayed to argue. As well address the Sphinx. At last Bartholomew had to lay down the poultry, and shell out into Squiffy's predatory palm. Only then—after Bennington had to his great relief got hold of the switch-key—would Squiffy accompany him.

All the interminable dark way to Porterville, Squiffy continued with great freedom of adjectives to express his opinions of Bennington.

Meek under this verbal torrent, for only meekness could now avail, Bartholomew submitted. Rain, somewhat increasing, dribbled down his back. The hens, which Squiffy positively refused to help carry, grew ever more weighty. A piercing chill transfixed Bartholomew. He shivered, chattered, but grimly endured. To become a hero, must one not tread long paths of pain?

Thus at last, after several eternities, they reached the Porterville garage.

IF you have ever aroused a garage-man at something after two A. M. of a cold September morn, and tried to swap four hens for a couple of gallons of gas, you can form some idea of the task that now—despite all chilliness—made Bartholomew sweat.

"Say! What the hell? Out o' gas, huh? An' no coin? Say! Hens? What the Hades would I want of hens?" The garage-man was burly, low-browed, unshaven. "Where d'you get 'em? Your own hens, huh? Got 'em back from chicken-thieves? Huh! That's a good one! An' besides, I don't want no hens. What the hell would I do with hens? Worth one-fifty apiece, huh? Six dollars' worth o' hens for two o' gas? Say! It looks all wrong! I don't want to get in dutch, takin' no stolen proppety. Huh? Lend you the gas, then? Nix on that! This here's a cash biz. An' besides, you got a nerve to be wakin' me up—an'—huh? What the devil do I care what you say your name is, or where you live? An'—"

"He's all right, this guy is," interposed Squiffy. "I know him. I'll identify him for you. I lived to his place in Hayton, a spell, an' I'm goin' back there now for a vacation, all spring an' summer. Mebbe longer, if I like it. Gee, but it's cold. Get a move on with the gas, sport!"

The garage-man set black hands on hips, grew silent, then burst into a kind of noise that was probably meant for laughter.

"Some kid!" he ejaculated. "Smart kid

—that's the kind for *me*. For your sake, kid, I'll take a chancet, this time. Steve Brodie did. But if them chickens is stolen, I'll kick myself I didn't nab you two an' get the hundred reward on chicken-thieves."

"See here!" Bartholomew angrily interrupted, "I tell you my name's—"

"Forget it, an' shoot us the poultry. Dump 'em down there in that box. Think I wanna stand here chewin' the rag all night? Y'aint got a quart or two of hooch, have you?"

"I should say not! What d'you think I am, anyhow? A rum-runner?"

"You might be almost any old thing, the way you're bunged up. Say, you must of been mixin' it some, by the look o' your clothes an' map."

"I got these injuries," said Bartholomew with dignity, "rescuing my poultry from thieves."

"All right, all right, I should worry! Slip us the birds!"

Bartholomew slipped him the birds. A quarter-hour from then, soaked and shivering, he drove homeward once more.

"Gee," murmured Squiffy at his side, with Bennington's property in his pockets, "is they really a reward of a hundred for chicken-thieves, round here? Huh! Well, say, we put *that* deal acrost all right, didn't we, old top?"

Then he relapsed into a contemplative silence. With Squiffy, silence was so unusual that Bartholomew felt misgivings. What demoniac plan might not even now be hatching in that thrice-demoniac brain?

BENNINGTON had not long to ponder this troublous question, for other woes than speculative ones very presently awaited him. Hardly had he driven into Hayton, beyond which lay the Idlewilde and the Beatrice he so longed once more to behold, when he observed a dim but familiar figure standing plumb in the middle of Main Street.

This figure, bulking large in a raincoat and rubber boots, held up a forbidding hand. Bennington slowed to an anxious halt.

"Good morning, Mr. Purrington," he tried to be casual, though at recognition of the sheriff certain misgivings assailed him.

Hell-roaring Jake by no means reciprocated the greeting.

"What you got in that car?" he demanded, point-blank, coming out of the headlight glare to the driving side.

"Property of my own. What's the idea, holding me up?"

"What's *your* idee, holdin' other people up?" the sheriff retorted with acerbity. "I got a tip 'bout you, Bennin'ton, from the garridge-feller back to Porterville. You got some birds in there, have ye?"

"Sure I have! My own, too. What d'you think I am?" demanded Bartholomew with rising anger. There are limits, and he had about reached his. "A roost-robber?"

"A man as'll write a piece like what you done about me, might be 'most anythin'. Lemme look!"

"Look away, and be hanged!"

"Now, now, none o' your lip!" Jake warned. Cold was his eye, and hostile. "When it comes to hangin', you're a danged sight more li'ble to get it, 'an what I am!"

"But I tell you, hen-thieves robbed me last night—this morning, that is. About midnight. I chased 'em. Got my birds back again, and—"

"Here, now, that wont go, Bennin'ton! The garridge-feller woke me up, on the telefoam, an' told me you give him that steer. I called your house, an' asked your wife if they was any o' your birds gone, an'—"

"You mean to say you had the nerve to disturb my wife?"

"I'll disturb more'n that, afore I get through with *you*!"

"But I tell you my best birds are gone! I've got 'em right here!"

"Well, they aint, an' *you* aint! Your wife was up, an' 'tarnal worried too, I'll tell ye, on account o' your goin'-on. Aint you ashamed, with a wife like that, to be up to these here low-down games? She sent the hired gal out to look at the hen-pen. They was tracks round there, so mebbe chicken-thieves was nigh your place, but they aint one danged bird o' yours missin'."

"Not missing?" gulped Bartholomew, his brain a-reel.

"Nary one! An' what kind o' birds you claim was stole off o' you?"

"Why, my—my Buff Orpingtons, of course, and—"

"Orpin'tons, eh?" Hell-roaring Jake jerked open the rear door of the car, extracted poultry, bore it squawking and flapping to the headlights. "Well then," and his voice rose maliciously triumphant, "how in tarnation you come to have Rhode Island Reds here?"

Bartholomew made a sort of clicking noise, but for a second found no word.

"Well, what ye got to say for y'rself?"

"Listen, Purrington! I—it can't be—there's a mistake, somewhere, and—I tell you—"

"Well, mebbe it can't be, but it is!" snarled the sheriff, his jaw like granite, mouth a slit of malice. "An' what's more, this here bird, here, is banded, an'—let's see, now—"

He squinted with ugly keen eyes as he held up the protesting fowl's metal-encircled leg. "An' it says J. T. P. on this here band, too! This bird's from Jabez Pratt's farm, or I miss *my* guess! Come on, now, Bennin'ton! No man can look as damn guilty as what you do, an' not *be* guilty! Give us the facts, now! Where'd you get that black eye an' cut lip? An' your clo'es all tore an' muddy? An' most of all, *where'd you get them birds?*"

"Listen to reason! This evidence is all circumstantial, and—"

"Mebbe, but it's got *you* where I want ye, all right. Say! I swanny, but a chicken-thief's the meanest varmint alive. I'd just as soon shoot one as shoot a skunk! Come on, now, give us the facts!"

EVEN as Bennington gasped and choked, unable to formulate any coherent answer, Squiffy unlimbered for action:

"Gee, Off'cer! Say, is they really a reward of a hundred bucks out for chicken-thieves? Is, eh? Well, if I help you land one, do I get a split of it? Sure I do, don't I? Well, gee, I'll spill you the right dope. This here guy, I was with him when he pulled the trick. I was hikin', an' he picked me up, an' after that he drove to that there farm you're tellin' about, an' he copped this crate o' birds. He tried to make me help him, but I wouldn't, an' he was goin' to lick me an' I defended myself, an' that's how he got hurt. Gee, *he* aint much of a scrapper! He pinched them birds, all right. That's on the level, see? An' do I get part o' the reward? 'Cause if I do, gee, I'm goin' West, to Bill Hart, an' shoot Injuns. Do I get it?"

"I'll see that you get it, all right, sonny," Hell-roaring Jake promised, with intensest joy. "An' I'll see that this here chicken-thief gets all that's comin' to *him*, too!"

"It's all a damned lie!" protested the outraged Bartholomew. "I tell you I was waked up by hearing somebody at my chicken-run, and—"

"Say, he's a smooth guy!" interrupted Squiffy. "But he's an awful bad actor. He's got a smoke-wagon, Off'cer. Look out, or he might plug you!"

"Is that true, Bennin'ton? Are you armed? If you are, that's highway robbery with a dangerous weepson, an' carries up to twenty-five years!"

"But I tell you—"

"Frisk him, Off'cer, an' see if he aint got a gat!"

"I—I—"

Jake parleyed no more, but seized Bartholomew Bennington and in a brace of shakes had the revolver out of his pocket.

"Ah-ha!" he gloated. "Now you be up against it! I see where you wont be writin' no more pieces ag'inst me for quite a spell! You wont be writin' *nothin'*!"

"But Purrington, just listen! I tell you—"

"An' he was goin' to shoot me, for tryin' to stop him from stealin' them birds, too!" shrilled Squiffy. "An' he tried to rob me of all my money. Gee! Forty-two cents he tried to cop off'm me. Said he'd shoot me an' throw my carcass to the crows. Let him deny *that*, now, if he can!"

"It's a damn lie! I only said any ordinary man would shoot him and throw his carcass to the crows! I promised to spare him, if he'd—"

"Ah-ha! So you *did* try to make this poor harmless boy be your accomplice in crime, did ye? An' try to highway-rob him an' threaten him with a dangerous weepson?"

"Sure he did!" vociferated Squiffy. "An' gee, when do I get the hundred?"

Hell-roaring Jake fair laughed with bliss as he exclaimed:

"Bartholomew Bennin'ton, I hereby arrest you for highway robbery, assault an' threats with a dangerous weepson, an' chicken-stealin'! Now will you submit peaceful an' come along to the lock-up, or have I got to put the nippers on ye?"

Even the worm, they say, will turn. Why not, then, Bartholomew Bennington? He saw red, all right; a whole abattoirful of red—the reddest kind of red. And seeing, he turned. Turned, very much so, to strike down his oppressors. But alas, Purrington struck first. So the turning ended in considerable disorder.

MARK TWAIN once wrote a story where he got his hero into such a jam that no possible way existed ever to get him out of it. So Mark quit cold, right there. I'd like to do the same.

It would take quite too long to give all the details. All you need to know is that truth is mighty and will prevail. So Bartholomew eventually got out of it—after a while. But he never dared rightly to figure up all the costs.

His only real consolation was that Squiffy didn't get the hundred, but was presently haled back to the Sheltering Arms—the Slaughtering Arms, Bennington wished they were. And after a month or so, everything was all ironed out, excepting Bartholomew's libel-suit against the editor of the *Gazette*.

But even today I advise you not to ask Bartholomew why he no longer keeps chickens. It mightn't be quite healthy for you.

CALVIN JOHNSON, one of the brightest of the newer luminaries in the sky of fiction, will contribute a splendid novelette, "The Perfect Stranger," to our next issue. And with it will appear some of the best work of Beatrice Grimshaw, Bertram Atkey, Clarence Herbert New, Calvin Ball, Warren Hastings Miller, John Mersereau and other writers of the really exceptional thing in the story line.



In Self-Defense

The gifted writer who gave us "Rats and Radios" last month here contributes another fine story of two old men of the desert.

By JOHN MERSEUR

NOT every day do two weather-beaten and time-scarred desert rats descend upon a big city and claim it and its appurtenances for their own. At least, such appeared to be the opinion of the appreciative and increasing crowd gathered in the lobby of the exclusive Hotel Rex, Los Angeles. The clerk, of course, was distressed; but as that appears to be the particular province of hotel clerks the world over, no one deigned to give him a tumble, as the phrase goes. Besides, to out the truth, his palm had been liberally crossed with silver from time to time by the Argonauts from out the Mohave back blocks, and so he had no kick coming.

The painful fact remains, however, that Pancake Eddie Poss and Walt Hardy, his partner of long and varied standing, were having a most tempestuous debate. And their voices, better attuned to the spaces of the desert, found remarkable range under the synthetic marble domes of the Rex.

"But what fer would she have use of a gosh-whanged doodad like that?" Hardy

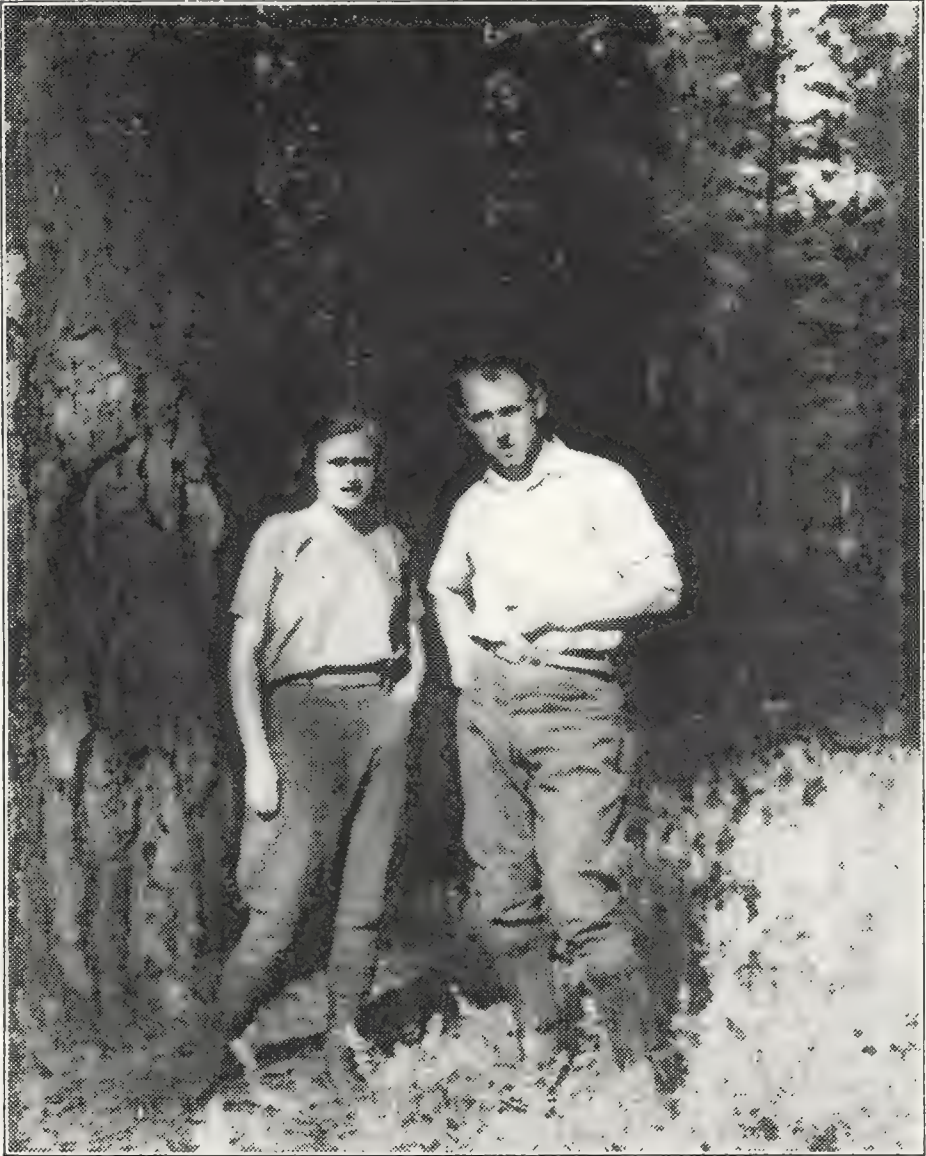
vociferated. "Minnie Flynn's a sensible gal. She's got red cheeks a'ready, so she don't need this here Piute war-paint. And the kids would only smear theirselves up with this barber-shop powder."

"But it's the latest thing, di-rect from Paris, France," Pancake Eddie insisted plaintively. "It's a vanity box—that's what it is; and all the ladies o' fashion lug 'em around."

"Minnie Flynn aint no lady of fashion," Hardy pointed out acidly. "She's the wife of a pore stage-driver. And it aint fitten fer you and me to put fool idears into her head and git Johnny down on us."

"She'll be tickled pink, I tell you," Eddie responded hotly. "Every woman likes to look purty, don't they? Hadn't I ought to know? The lady that sold it to me said—"

"Yeah, you ought to know," his partner interposed cuttingly. "Shore you ought to know, Eddie, after loanin' that thousand to that fake widdy woman up to Barstow! She learned you somethin' you ought to remember, I should think—"



JOHAN MERSEREAU knows the desert well, and the sea also; and he writes of them and their folk with the vividness, force and conviction that come from intimate acquaintance. When it comes to picking a place to live, however—well, here we have a recently taken photograph of Mr. Mersereau, along with his wife, on their beautiful homestead in the foothills of the Sierras.

"Meanin' that Minnie Flynn aint on the level, be you?" Eddie asked, his voice rising. "You ought to be ashamed o' yer-self, Walt, you sure ought. After Mis' Flynn fed us fer a week straight before we made our big strike! Have you forgotten that, you ornery chuckwalla?"

HARDY'S eyes batted under the baleful stare. As usual, he was finding his well-intentioned words deftly flipped back at him as boomerangs; and he was compelled to hunt cover.

"No, I aint forgot, and I never will," he protested. "Johnny and his woman are the salt of the earth, but—"

"Then it aint too good fer her, and I'm a-goin' to give it to her when we git back to Maricopa. What's more, I'm a-goin' to pre-sent it by my lonely and leave you plumb out in the cold, Walt. I paid fer it myself—"

"With our *dinero*, yeah!" Hardy exclaimed. "And I bet it cost all o' five dollars."

It was his partner's turn to wince. Opening the beautiful silk-lined case, he rapped on the highly polished mirror set within the cover.

"See? Gen-u-ine French plate glass."

"And that's from Paris, too, I guess, hey?" Hardy stared at his partner intently. "That means it cost ten—er more."

The victim of the accounting took a deep breath.

"It cost—fifty dollars, and it's wuth every danged cent of it."

THERE are times when even hotel clerks must rise to the occasion and take the rôle of mediator. And this, decidedly, was one of those occasions. Walt Hardy's wrath, obviously, had reached its zenith. From there it dived like a hawk from the blue down, down upon its quarry. Even Pancake Eddie, a veteran of such verbal encounters, quailed before the onslaught. And then the immaculate clerk stepped into the breach—and strangely enough, found himself outflanked and enfiladed by an instantly reunited pair of partners.

It is enough to say in this connection that Pancake Eddie and Walt Hardy did not pay the extreme penalty for their crime. It was even made clear to them that they might remain indefinitely in Los Angeles—at some hotel other than the Rex. Incidentally, however, it cost Hardy

just fifty dollars to assuage the clerk's injured feelings and restore the crystal in his wrist-watch. Which sort of balanced Eddie's previous extravagance and made it possible for him to take with him on that night's train the much-discussed vanity box for Minnie Flynn. And that, in turn, will be shown to have an important bearing on the life and works of a desert desperado, one "Blinky" Coyle, who drew last and shot first—and who, by that token, turns this little farce into a tragedy.

STRANGE is the working of any human mind. But strangest of all the mental processes are those of almost any team of old-timers, who, through years of common privation, suffering and hopes deferred, have earned the name of partners. For more than ten years, Pancake Eddie and Walt Hardy had pooled their grub, their pack-rigging and their dust. For over a decade they had followed together the far trails of the Mohave Desert hinterland. Each had demonstrated time and again an unflinching courage and devotion. Each would have laid down his life cheerfully for the other.

But—Eddie and his partner were not on speaking terms when they disembarked at daybreak from the branch-line train at the little desert settlement where they were to meet Johnny Flynn and the stage for Maricopa. Thirty dusty, heat-shrouded miles still lay between them and that lawless desert oasis. Leagues more divided them from their rich prospect in the Pelado Buttes. But for all their silence, they were glad to be back from their vacation. They were seekers—born to the lure of the open road and what lies just beyond. Out here among the big horizons, they *belonged*. Here, anywhere, was home to them. Eddie's eyes, shrewd and deceptively mild-appearing, widened to the glory of the desert dawn sweeping up to the eastward. Hardy's stubborn, uncompromising jaw relaxed a trifle.

"Gee, Eddie," he began impulsively, "it's great to be back, aint it?"

Eddie's features became a mask. Here, he saw, was a peace-offering. Walt was ready to come down off his high horse and act reasonable at last. But Eddie, according to the time-honored ritual, could not extend complete forgiveness at once. To do that would cheapen the gesture. He appeared to consider.

"It is a right nice mornin'," he admitted

finally. Then he chuckled. "Dang it, Walt, I'm jest achin' to tell Johnny how you yanked that hotel *hombre's* necktie off'm him!"

Hardy grinned widely. But suddenly his face sobered.

"When you throwed him down on the sofy, Eddie, are you shore he didn't bust up the glass in that there vanity box we got fer Mis' Flynn?"

Pancake Eddie shook his head in a vigorous negative.

"I'd 'a' worked over him proper if he had." He paused, squinting a quick glance into the east. "Better let's eat. The stage's due at the American House in a half-hour."

Boon companions again, the partners hurried through their breakfast and, each with a toothpick atilt between his teeth, waited on the hotel steps for the stage to come up. It appeared presently, slewing around a corner in a cloud of dust, with the six half-tamed broncos at a dead run. Eddie gave voice to a little cry of disappointment:

"Johnny aint drivin'." His brows drew together. "It's—it's Bud Ferris hisself. I wonder if—" He left the thought unfinished, and Hardy did not prompt him. The same dread thought had occurred to both. In the desert country, stage-driving is at best a hazardous pursuit. The Maricopa run was especially dangerous, what with sand-storms, skittish horses, and frequent tempting shipments of bullion. And devil-may-care Johnny Flynn had been in the best of health only a few days before.

THE stage drew up with a grinding of brakes. Bud Ferris wound the lines around the brake-handle and clambered down. And the partners found additional food for alarm in his subdued greeting—aside from the fact that, as owner of the line, he drove only in case of emergency.

"Where's Johnny?" they demanded in unison.

Ferris tossed their suitcases into the boot with grim energy. Numbered among his closest friends, the partners knew him too well to try to hasten his reply. They waited with what patience they could until he faced them again. There was an ugly glint in his usually smiling eyes.

"Aint you heard?" he asked heavily. "Johnny's—dead. Blinky Coyle shot him night before last in a mix-up at the Big Mug."

A bulge formed on Walt Hardy's jaw. "Did they git Blinky yet?"

Ferris nodded.

"He didn't try to run away—damn him! Too slick fer that, the coyote. Aint he been in half a dozen killin's before and learned the ropes?" The stage-owner shrugged hopelessly. "He's chain lightnin' on the draw. Rags the other *hombre* into pullin' first—like he did Johnny—then pots him! And that rot-gut gang down to the Big Mug backs him up. The corner's jury sets this afternoon—but what kin they do? He's got his alibi."

"Self-defense, hey?" Eddie filled in. "And that lets Blinky out ag'in, I suppose—till some innercent-lookin' pilgrim comes along an' beats him to it."

"Which means never," Ferris rasped out. "Coyle is the best hand with a six-gun in the Mohave, and you know it, Eddie. We'd all give our eyeteeth to shoot it out with him, but what's the good of committin' suicide? He simply can't be beat."

Eddie's shrewd eyes flickered.

"Aint no one *cain't* be beat, Bud. Sooner er later, they's allus a *hombre* sits in that's jest a leetle mite quicker and better. Er else somethin' unexpected turns up an' puts the Injun sign on these here champeens. I seen it too many times. An' mark my words, *Blinky Coyle'll git his'n!*" His voice wavered and broke. With misted eyes, he looked down at the package in his hand—the present that, he knew, would have delighted the impoverished stage-driver no less than his wife. "An'—an', so help me, if no one else aint man enough to try, I'll—"

Hardy pulled open the door of the Concord stage and piloted his trembling partner inside.

"Git in, Eddie," he said gently. "An' take holt of yerself. We cain't do nothin' fer Johnny now. What we got to figger is how to take care of pore Mis' Flynn an' the kids."

Pancake Eddie permitted himself to be forced into a seat; but his mind was not to be turned from its course.

"The murderin' devil, I'll git him!" he muttered from time to time as the coach rattled along. "Somewhere, sometime—I don't know jest how—but I'll git him. Johnny Flynn was a friend o' mine!"

NIGHT fell gently upon the desert. The fevered, sun-scourged hills faded away and away into the soft rose and amethyst

of twilight. Lights showed ahead—pricking out the single dusty thoroughfare that was Maricopa. Six weary, lathered broncos raised their drooping heads and broke into a run. Bud Ferris grunted, tightening his cramped hold on the lines. Walt Hardy stole an uneasy glance at his partner, whose drawn, strained features gave no sign either of anticipation or aversion.

Only when the stage pulled past the Big Mug did Eddie exhibit any emotion. The shaky syncopation of a tinny player-piano reached him then from behind the swinging glass doors, and echoes of raw laughter.

HE shivered. His fingers clenched unconsciously over the butt of the long-barreled revolver he had removed from his suitcase at the noontime pause. The weapon hung low, butt well to the front, at his left hip. Pancake Eddie was counted a top hand at the cross-draw—although distinctly out of the class of killers such as Blinky Coyle. For obvious reasons, gunmen favor a short-length barrel. Eddie's was an arm of general utility.

Hardy rested his hand encouragingly on his partner's knee.

"Buck up!" he advised. "They aint no sense in lettin' it eat into you thisaway. Like you said, Blinky'll git his'n—in time."

Eddie jerked half-around. His eyes were flaming.

"In time! Gawd! Aint he lived too long a'ready?" His toil-gnarled fingers clenched until the knuckles stood out white beneath their tan. "I cain't stand it no longer, Walt. I *cain't*! I'm goin' to find out. If Blinky's been let loose,—if that's him and his gang a-laughin' there in the Big Mug,—I'm goin' to call him out. I'm goin' to call him out tonight!"

Actually, Eddie was the victim of a not-uncommon form of mania induced by intense sorrow and a brooding sense of injustice. He was in the grip of an hysteria in which odds counted as nothing. And now that he had crystallized a plan of action into words, he would follow through: he would shoot it out with Blinky Coyle tonight. There would be no turning him. Argument, pleading, cajolery would fall all on deaf ears.

Without any scientific tracing of processes, Walt Hardy recognized that his partner's mind was "sot." Eddie would carry through his mad plan to the letter. And that could mean but one thing. An-

other victim would be added to the list of Coyle's victims shot in self-defense—unless Hardy could slip a joker into the stacked deck of Fate and withdraw it at exactly the proper moment. And that was a thing almost impossible, for Blinky Coyle usually dealt his own pat hands.

The sweat stood out on Hardy's forehead as he struggled to formulate a plan. What could he do? How might he save Eddie? There was only a short time in which to perfect a scheme—an hour at most. And Hardy knew himself to be as far outclassed at the draw by his partner, as Eddie was by Coyle. There was no question, then, of substituting himself in place of Pancake Eddie. Hardy was too level-headed to consider that. As he analyzed it, there was but one slim chance—the framing of such big odds against the killer that he would not dare accept Eddie's challenge.

The stage drew up before the Maricopa House. Bud Ferris handed the partners their suitcases.

"Take 'em both up, will you, Eddie?" Hardy requested. "And order me a Hamburg fry fer supper. I'll be back in five minutes—after I've rid down to the barn and seen Bud aint been starvin' our cay-uses."

"All right," Eddie nodded listlessly. "Only make it fast, Walt. I got business to 'tend to soon as we've et."

FOR the sake of appearances, Hardy climbed up on the seat beside Ferris. But as Eddie did not once look back, the stage remained standing before the hotel, while Hardy and Ferris engaged in a rapid, low-voiced conversation. In this, Hardy took the lead at first. But soon the stage-owner snapped in a laconic remark now and then. A glint came into his eyes. His shoulders hunched down.

"Count me in to do my part," he promised finally. "But I'd ruther swing the hound. He's got it coming."

"Dassent take the chance of a slip-up," Hardy pointed out. "If we git shet of him my way, we're lucky. And now git movin', Bud. No time to lose, and Eddie'll be back down any second."

"But are you shore Eddie'll eat supper first?" Ferris asked fearfully. "I got to have some time."

"He'll eat. He's plumb wore out, and he'll savvy he has to git some holt on hisself." A smile flitted across Hardy's som-

ber features. "That little rooster aint *all* damn' fool, you know."

The stage rumbled on down the street. Hardy swung off just beyond the circle of light cast from the hotel's windows. Loitering there for a few minutes, he entered the Maricopa House with every appearance of haste and hunted out Eddie in the dining-room. With a half-audible sigh of relief, he noted that Eddie sat with his back to the windows fronting on the street.

"The donks is fat enough to bust," he prevaricated easily. "Where's supper?"

"It's ordered, Walt." Eddie toyed with a fork, without looking up. "Blinky's been let out."

HARDY ventured no comment. From time to time, as he waited, he peered covertly at the street outside. After a while, his vigil was rewarded. He saw men go by, law-abiding men of family who usually took no part in Maricopa's hectic night life. Others were leaving the hotel lobby unobtrusively, too, prospectors, long-line skimmers, double-jack artists—but all, coincidentally, friends either of Eddie or Johnny Flynn. And all were bound, apparently, in the general direction of the Big Mug. Hardy gradually relaxed from his tense posture; it was evident to him that Bud Ferris was wasting no time.

"What you lookin' after?" Eddie demanded suddenly.

"Why—why, nothin' at all, Eddie." Hardy choked up. "I—you see—" But the arrival of the waiter at that critical juncture brought Eddie's suspicious glance away from the window.

Hardy made some pretense of eating, sparring for additional time. Eddie left his order practically untouched. After gulping down a cup of hot coffee, he waited with mounting impatience for his partner to finish. Without warning, he shoved back his chair and stood up.

"I'm goin' down to the Big Mug."

"Wait jest a minute," Hardy begged.

"No; I'm goin' now. No call fer you to come, Walt—less you want to."

Hardy followed him outside, precipitately.

"I'm done. Guess I'll mosey along."

In silence they plodded together down the street. Eddie pushed his way through the Big Mug's swinging door, his partner at his heels. The stench of poorly trimmed kerosene lamps met them. A pall of stale tobacco smoke shifted lazily about. The

player-piano still hammered out its erratic tunes. And dark bottles stood quite openly on the polished bar beside "three-finger" glasses.

Eddie paused, evidently taken aback by the unusual crowd filling the long room. All his friends seemed there—the old-timers who usually patronized the back room of the Maricopa House for poker and an evening's entertainment. But his hesitation was only momentary. A single-track purpose guided him now. His eyes peered about sharply until they found that for which they sought—a slender, lowering-browed man of about thirty, whose gimlet eyes squinted and shifted incessantly as he stood drinking and laughing at the far end of the bar. With some difficulty Eddie plowed a way to him, impeded and followed by friends who demanded details of his "spree in Los."

Eddie tapped his man on the shoulder. "Blinky Coyle, I want to talk with you!"

THE desperado spun around alertly. His hand paused in a clawlike downward sweep as he made out who it was. And his lips smoothed out into a grin over his long, "gopher" teeth. But his blinking eyes remained narrowed.

"Well! Pancake Eddie! The old eat'em-up buzzard from the Panamints," he remarked in a tone of mock alarm, which for that very reason conveyed a subtle insult. "And out fer lions and tigers—and toy balloons, by the looks of him."

"Only out fer a rat, Blinky—fer you," Eddie cut in quietly. "Johnny Flynn was a friend o' mine. You kilt him, murdered him, and thought you got away with it. But you aint! I'm here t' square accounts with you fer him—now!"

Coyle's harsh laugh rang out.

"Hear him, gents, threatenin' to do me in. And me 'tendin' to my own affairs, buttin' in on no one's game." His lips were smiling still, but his slitlike eyes remained riveted on Eddie—the eyes of a killer. "It aint my game to pick on goofy, sun-struck fossils. Roll yer hoop, little feller, and let me be."

Eddie's body tensed. Coyle's supple fingers hovered negligently above his belt.

"You murdered him!" Eddie gritted out. "And I'm tellin' you, Blinky Coyle, that you're a yellow, damn' coward—" A cry of mingled rage and disappointment burst from his lips. Two men, one on each side,

had suddenly pinioned Eddie's arms to his sides. He struggled furiously to free himself, but his efforts were of no avail.

SIMULTANEOUSLY there came a crash of breaking glass in a rear window. Through the breach, Bud Ferris leveled a sawed-off express-messenger's shotgun on Coyle.

"Elevate 'em, Blinky!" he advised grimly. "You don't pull none of yer alibi tricks tonight."

The killer darted a quick glance about the room. He saw that the bartender already had sought refuge below the level of the bar. His other cronies, outnumbered two to one by Eddie's avowed and ready friends, made no move to rescue him. He perceived that he was cornered. He raised his hands ceilingward—empty.

Ferris handed in the shotgun to a willing accomplice and entered the room through the back door. He stepped directly up to Coyle and disarmed him.

"Blinky," he said, "you've plumb shot your bolt in Maricopy. Some of us is jest nacherally eager to swing you up, but most seem to be fer straight law and order—as fer as that's practical. The jury said today that you shot Johnny Flynn in self-defense and that you was free to go. You are! You're free to git the hell out of here—and keep goin'! If you come back, er argue the p'int, it's the rope. So if you're the wise buckaroo I think you are, you'll git my drift *pronto*—and step!"

Coyle came to a quick decision. He had been a successful gambler with life because he recognized his own limitations. He had no relish at all for bucking the other fellow's game.

"I'll blow," he muttered, slouching toward the door, "with no regrets. And I wont come back." He paused for an instant, however, with one hand hooked over the glass door panel. His blinking eyes fastened malevolently on Pancake Eddie, still struggling to free himself. "But I'll see you later! *Adios*." The door swung back and he was gone, the beat of his mount's hoofs fading off into the night.

The bartender raised a pallid face from behind his breastwork.

"Gents," he quavered, "step up. The drinks are on the house."

The impromptu Vigilante Committee pressed up to the mahogany. The tension of the last few minutes was broken. Bud Ferris climbed on a chair, glass in hand.

"A toast!" he shouted. "To the gamest little bantam of 'em all! To—" A look of blank astonishment overspread his face. "Where the hell is Eddie, anyhow?"

But Eddie was gone. As soon as he had been released, he had stolen from the saloon, his departure lost in the general excitement. After him followed his ever-faithful partner. Together they were making their way back to the Maricopa House. Tears blurred Eddie's washed-out blue eyes. His voice was choked and broken.

"I didn't have no chancet, Walt—no chancet at all!"

"No, you didn't," Hardy agreed with deep feeling. "But you did yer best, Eddie. And anyway, we're goin' to take Mis' Flynn and the kids out to the mine if they'll go. And—and, you don't blame me, do you, Eddie, fer what happened?"

"No, I don't blame you none, Walt," his partner gave quick forgiveness. "You acted accordin' to yer lights, I reckon, in framin' me thataway. But—sometime, somewhere, I'm goin' to have it out with Blinky Coyle. I got the feelin'."

They plodded on in silence. But Hardy's eyes were thoughtful and touched with a new fear. He could not forget the killer's vindictive glare, his last promise. Perhaps, too, therein lay the reason for Eddie's willingness to bide his time. At any rate, Hardy saw that his plan had failed in its ultimate purpose. It had merely postponed the inevitable day of reckoning. And the lonely Pelado Buttes lay out beyond the last outpost of the law. There an evidence of self-defense was not requisite.

TRIFLES sometimes assume to alter destinies in this complicated scheme of life: A cobweb spun across a hollow tree, a penny on a rail—a bagatelle from Paris, France, for Minnie Flynn.

It was not until early September, however, that the stage-driver's widow was presented with the partners' gift. At that time, she had been in their camp amid the jagged Pelado Buttes for over two months. A small, faded woman, with hair prematurely gray, she still faced life bravely, "beholden" to no one. Over their protests, she insisted on cooking for Eddie and Walt and their growing crew of miners.

The mine had really developed into a valuable property. Late in June, shortly after that memorable night in the Big Mug, the partners had crosscut into a big

ore-body. And when Eddie himself admitted—in a moment of jubilation—that a mining engineer for the powerful Geltman interests was to inspect the property sometime in September, insistent rumors of a big “high-grade” strike spread throughout the desert country.

The rumor was, at least, premature. It was true that the ore assayed to a high average, but it was not until the first week in September that the high-grade was really tapped. And it was then that Pancake Eddie and Hardy, having exhausted mutual and blasphemous congratulations, descended with the good news upon Mrs. Flynn. They found her busily at work in the cook-shack. Eddie tossed a fragment of spotted quartz down beside her pan of potatoes.

“Looky!” he cried. “We’ve opened her up at last, Mis’ Flynn. High-grade—rotten with gold!”

“IT’S wonderful! Congratulations, boys!” Her eyes, straying to a small photograph pinned beside the window, filled with tears. “Johnny—would of been so glad for you.”

Eddie slid a package onto the table before her. Thoughtful of her sorrow, the partners had so far withheld their gift of the vanity case. But now, in a time of fortune for themselves, they hoped to share with her their happiness.

“There now, Mis’ Flynn. We thought mebbe—that is, Walt and me sort o’ felt you might find some use fer this leetle doodad, not havin’ any sort o’ layout here for a lady to primp up with. And—we hope you’ll like it, ma’am.”

With deft fingers, Minnie Flynn unwrapped the package.

“Wait till I see!” She halted the partners’ hasty retreat. Then a tremulous smile broke through her tears. A little gasp of astonishment and pleasure escaped her lips. For a moment, her sorrow was eclipsed. Never, in a life devoid of luxury, had she hoped to possess such a wonderful thing as this. But she had dreamed. And to her there was nothing incongruous about the gift. No thought of its utter impracticability in this sweating fastness of the desert marred the first joy of possession. It was a symbol from that other world—the world of dreams come true.

“I—I can’t thank you enough, boys,” she faltered. “You’ve done so much for me. And—and if you don’t mind, I’m

going to paste Johnny’s picture on the glass where I kin look at him—always.”

Eddie, ill at ease as always in the presence of gratitude, had stepped over to the window, through which the hot afternoon sun was slanting. Striving vainly for any excuse to escape, his glance shifted from the mouth of the mine tunnel to the turn in the trail where it broke down into the desert flat. There his eyes remained fixed. Two mounted men, one behind the other, had just made the turn and were riding slowly toward the mine. The horsemen’s features were not discernible at the distance, but the one leading was sufficiently unique in dress to be recognized instantly. Eddie dropped his hand from his holster. Who but an Easterner would wear simultaneously a pith sun helmet and a heavy corduroy suit into the desert?

“Walt!” Eddie cried excitedly. “He’s come—that engineer feller the Geltmans is sendin’ out to look over the mine.”

Hardy turned and ran for the door.

“You meet him, Eddie,” he called out over his shoulder. “I’m goin’ to beat it into the south drift and hold up them shots so’s we kin have a look-see right off. Whyinell didn’t the *hombre* come next week like they wrote?”

Alone again, Minnie Flynn touched a handkerchief to her eyes.

“Good luck, boys!” she murmured, from a full heart. “You’re the salt of the earth.” Then, sifting a little flour into a saucer, she set about stirring up a thin paste with which to attach Johnny’s picture inside the vanity case.

A FEW rods down the trail, Eddie met up with the newcomers. They had already dismounted. The man wearing the pith helmet tossed his bridle-rein to his companion and stepped forward. Eddie was glad to revise a first impression. The *hombre* was nobody’s fool, he saw—even if he did wear corduroys! He had keen, straightforward eyes and an aggressive jaw.

“Keller is my name,” the stranger introduced himself. “From the Geltmans.”

“Glad to meet you.” Eddie held out his hand. “I’m Poss. Didn’t expect you fer a few days yet, but—” He paused, sensing that something was amiss. The other had not accepted his hand. Rather, he seemed to have drawn back.

“I was fortunate,” Keller explained, stressing the last word, “most fortunate;

I happened to run into a guide at Mohave Junction, and we came through via Johannesburg." He stopped abruptly, his boyish face flushing; but his eyes did not flinch before Eddie's intent glance. "Let's get right down to brass tacks, Poss. I'm not the sort to beat around the bush. And if you're on the level, you won't get sore at what I have to say."

"Spit it out," Eddie advised. "We'll git along."

"Well—I've heard reports that you and your partner are nothing more or less than professional mine-salters!"

Eddie's face went white to the lips.

"Who told you that? I'd like to meet up with him."

"I'm not at liberty to say."

EDDIE remained silent for a moment.

He racked his brain to recall the name of anyone in Jo'burg who might wish him ill, and could not. He had only one enemy in the whole Mohave country virulent enough, infamous enough—From the corner of his eye, he saw the engineer's guide drop the bridle-reins in his hand and tilt back the wide brim of the Stetson slouched over his eyes. Half-seeing at first, Eddie looked up. Until now, engaged particularly with Keller, he had paid no particular attention to his heavily bearded companion.

The climaxes, the dénouements of life come sometimes in the winking of a lash. There is no preliminary flourish of trumpets, no beating of drums. The motives are rooted in the past, the impulse to act hangs pendant on the thread of memory. The thread snaps. The thing is done and over with. And people stand agape, aghast, powerless to intervene—as did the Geltmans' mining scout, Keller.

He spun half around, following the line of Pancake Eddie's burning glance. He saw his guide crouching there. The blinking eyes had narrowed. The pupils were mere dots, cold as steel and barren of mercy. The slender hand poised motionless, beautiful and repulsive as a vulture resting on the wind. There was the killer—ruthless, waiting, eager.

"Blinky Coyle!" It was Pancake Eddie's choked voice. "You damned, dirty liar!"

The hand swooped down. There was no mistaking; Keller saw his guide reach first for his holster, and tried to cry out. He saw the revolver flash upward, a living,

venomous thing. For an instant a dart of light seemed to strike and strike back from the killer's eyes. It was as if the flame of his hate had seared his sight. But if he wavered, the time was infinitesimal. A shot rang out. Another followed—like a first echo flung from the buttes behind.

Pancake Eddie stumbled back. His revolver spun from his hand. But his eyes remained unafraid. With one hand raised and knotted into a fist, he tottered toward his enemy.

Blinky Coyle stood where he was, his weapon slowly sinking to his side. His thin lips, already half-parted into a smile, drooped back over his teeth. He partially raised his gun hand again, took a step forward—and pitched headlong across the trail. A dark ooze spread quickly over the slender hand doubled beneath his chest. Keller, his face blanched, felt without avail for a pulse at the killer's wrist and temple. Then, seeing Eddie weaving on his feet, he sprang to his assistance.

"Are you hurt—badly?"

"No. Only bored through the shoulder." Eddie shook his head dazedly, as if things beyond his comprehension had transpired. "But—my Gawd! He drew first. Me—I shot Blinky Coyle in self-defense!"

MINNIE FLYNN came running up. A desert woman born, she took quick and efficient command. One glance at his wound told her that Eddie was painfully but not dangerously wounded.

"Help me lug him into the cook-house!" she ordered the engineer. "Git hold!"

"I'm walkin'," Eddie insisted. "I aint no baby." But he suffered the others to help him along. Passing the cook-house window, however, he shook his head impatiently and closed his eyes. A concentrated glare—the same, had Keller noted it, that he had observed touch the killer's eyes as he drew—had blinded Eddie for an instant.

"What's that damn'—beg pardon, Mis' Flynn—what's that danged light?" he demanded querulously.

"It's nothing," she replied soothingly, unconscious as were the others that into her hand had been given an instrument of fate and retribution, "nothing at all. Jest my vanity box mirror, Eddie, flashin' back the sun. I put it there in the window, jest before I heard you shoot—to dry pore Johnny's picture."



The Crusoe Ship

Lack of funds was about to end a daring South Seas treasure-quest when—but read for yourself what the seekers found on a hurricane-swept Pacific islet.

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW

THEY lie who say that romance is dead in the Pacific.

I grant you, if you go seeking it old, weary, far-traveled, with an eye that looks first for the quality of the bed and the food, and last for the twinkling of palm-fingers upon sunset skies, the ray of a star in a lagoon, you will grow angry with such as Herman Melville, Stevenson, Louis Becke; you will call them charlatans, who pretend to impossible powers and visions. Their swans are geese; their silk purses, that one had heard so much of, are nothing but pigs' ears.

Or if you go young, disillusioned, dissipated, with a cargo of prewar whiskies and champagnes, part under hatches and part in your head, you will surely return laden with beach stories of a kind you could have got in any European club, with a few shell chains and toy canoes, with an immense, superior conviction that you know all about it, and that it's not worth knowing. . . .

We, the seekers after the all-but-mythical treasure of Marooner's Ring, were young—save Captain Clarity, and he was

at least a sailor, with a sailor's conjugal, quarreling love for the sea. We had no more drink on board than four self-respecting men, and one girl who ate chocolates, should have. We were romantic, in the right sense of the word, else we had never embarked on such a cruise, where the wages for one and all were like enough to be romance and nothing else. And so the glamour, the wonder of the island world were ours for the taking, and we fed upon them.

Little else was there to feed upon, in these latter months of the long trek from atoll to atoll of immense Pacific spaces, vast to the imagination as the distances of fixed stars. The ports where we could have provisioned were few, and many hundreds of miles apart. And Ellis' letter of credit, on which the whole expedition depended, was a scarred, maimed veteran by now. There was enough charter-money to take us to Callao—perhaps not quite enough provisions. And we had thousands of miles still to explore—with good hope at the end of it, if only the trip could hold on.

One hears little of these difficulties in most treasure cruises. I wonder if the people who go out after the traditional chest of doubloons beneath the fifth tree in the burned ravine, and the gold cups and crucifixes, and the double handfuls of rubies, and the seven large diamonds, and nineteen medium large, and sixty-three smaller but most valuable gems, have always a millionaire friend at their backs, and if so, why they don't stop at home, and in the beautiful language of God's Own Country, "chew his ear," instead of getting seasick in little boats upon big seas?

WE had no millionaire to depend on; for which reason our tins of meat no longer made the delightful show in the lazarette that tins do make when nobly ranged; and our weevils had very little flour left them for camouflage or clothing. This was hard on the weevils, and on us.

Captain Clarity seemed to think that it was also hard on him. "You said you was goin' for Callao, time we ran in under Hala-Hari in the big blow," he reminded Jerry and myself, one incomparable blue morning, when it should have been enough for any human creature (not being an Earnest Woman, or the manager of a department-store) to lie flat on the broad of its back under the narrow poop awning, tasting the salt on its lips, and watching the seas run by.

Jerry looked as if some one had run a pin into him, and he were determined not to wince—a long pin, a sharp one.

You see, South America—any port—meant the giving up of the trip, and the very possible marriage of Ysabel and Rutland Stewart-Ellis. I may say here that Clarity did not seem so much opposed to that engagement as he had been at first. Ellis had the wisdom of the stupid man, which we have all of us seen and wondered at in our time. He had contrived to drop remarks about the position of his family—which was good, including even a title (Scotch baron), about expectations, about things that his people would do for him. Ellis was the sort of man who is always expecting billets, positions, pensions, something from somebody—who often gets what he expects, and in any case never weakens his expectant position by doing anything for himself.

I do not suppose Clarity liked him. But I imagine he saw Ysabel secure, well-

placed. Jerry Dawson—well, there's no one like Jerry. Everybody loves him. And did you ever know a man whom everybody loved, who had the open palm that asks and asks?

To put it briefly, Ellis' hard-up-ness was not likely to be everlasting. Jerry's was—unless we found the lost gold crowns of Marooner's Ring. It all came back to that in the end. And you must remember that Clarity did not believe in the Ring, or the crowns, or, indeed, anything at all about it.

So, on that fairy morning, he came stumping along from his cabin, his nut-cracker face hard set, and his small gray eyes almost buried beneath their curtain of grizzly brows, to tell Jerry—and incidentally myself—that the course ought to be changed. And immediately the wedding bells of Ysabel began tolling in Jerry's brain. Ellis was a little way off, sitting in a deck-chair; the girl was near him. She had her back to him, it is true, but he could have reached out, and touched her, without stirring more than an arm.

There was silence for quite twenty seconds. Then Jerry, without getting up, or looking at the Captain, said shortly: "Callao be it." And that was that.

THE sea, all round us, ran clear and empty from velvet rim to rim. But, in fancy, I saw a ship sinking—hull disappearing, rail meeting the water, bow at last plunging down, stern rearing high, as the sucked-in foam closed over.

It was near eight bells. The Captain stumped to the open end of the poop, and held his sextant ready. In a minute the sharp chime rang out from the bell; the new course was shouted to the Raraton-gan at the helm. The Captain went down to his cabin.

Jerry quietly rolled over, and lay with his face on his arms. It was certainly growing hot up there. . . .

And I found myself thinking of days that were a long way past, days when I hadn't had to watch my weight and my lungs, and go softly for fear of T. B.; when I had had the right, like other men, to lie awake and make myself miserable of nights if I liked. The moon coming over the windowsill—some nightbird, God knows what, calling to its mate in the Australian bush—I with Elizabeth Browning's Italian lines running foolishly in my brain:

And through it all the nightingales
Drove straight and full their long clear call,
Like arrows through heroic mails,
And love was vocal in it all. . . .
I cannot bear those nightingales!

There would be a lot of things that Jerry would not be able to bear, in the time that was coming. And he would have to bear them, because of the little minx in the shirt and trousers, sitting cross-legged beside Stewart-Ellis, that Ysabel who, it seemed, did not know her own mind—who liked one man, and was going to marry another.

The wind, that had been blowing on our starboard bow, seemed suddenly to shift, until it was almost fair behind us. The *Lady Macquarie* swung to it, got down to work, and began to make the foam chatter along her streaming sides.

Clarity had the ship on her new course, and Callao lay ahead.

We went down to lunch, and certainly the scantiness of the meal justified our skipper's recent change. It had got to the point when nobody had any appetite, and everybody wanted everyone else to be hungry—if you know what I mean. If you do not, you are lucky.

There was plenty of talk, but none of it had to do with South America, and none of it touched on treasure-hunting. We all had lots to say about weather and wind, and fish, and the native crew, and the sunset last night, and the game of draughts in which Ysabel had beaten her father—trifles that make up the sum of days, on a sailing-ship. It seemed as if no one wanted to think, and especially, as if nobody wished to emphasize and make certain the new condition of affairs, by openly speaking of it. I imagine we all had a silly conviction that if nothing at all was said, things perhaps, somehow, would manage to come round of themselves.

ALL that afternoon, and all the next morning, we sailed on our new course, the ship swaying lightly, dancing just a little, as if well pleased that her owners had made up their minds at last. In the high breasts of the sails, one heard the humming that goes with a merry breeze; reef-points endlessly played piano along taut canvas edges; there was a trill of flurrying small waves, along the keel. East and east toward Callao we went, and nothing happened.

I could not look at Jerry's eyes. I knew too well what was in them.

Quite late in the day, toward sundown, he came along to where I was sitting, I remember, and asked me if I'd ever heard ships sing to themselves. I understood him, because I had.

"There was the *Elder Dempster*—when I was fourteen," I told him. "I used to think she went reeling all down the Bay of Biscay to that rowdy old 'Washington Post.' She was a squat sort of tub—kicked up and laughed. . . . Yes, and I've heard a homebound cargo tramp in the Red Sea champing out 'Hiawatha' all the way. The tunes fit the ships."

"What does this schooner sing?" he asked. But I could not tell him.

"Listen," he said. "Schubert. . . . Can't you hear?"

I don't know if he hypnotized me or not, but I listened, and heard. The *Lady Macquarie*, over the long rollers, swayed dancingly, with intoxicated sadness, to the poignant, stately lament of the "Adieu."

It was just afterward that something happened—a small thing, but if it had been as small as it seemed, I should not have been telling about it here.

WE had not sighted land for many days; we were in one of the great empty plains of the Pacific, where you might drop down Europe and lose it. From what Clarity had said, I had thought we should not sight anything now, before the blue coasts of Peru loomed up ahead, in a few days' time. But, on toward sunset, a little speck rose out of the lonely sea, far away on our starboard bow.

"What's that?" I asked. We were all on deck; one lives on deck, in these small, stuffy boats. Clarity was a little above us, on the poop, swaying to the roll of the ship so perfectly that you never saw him move. He had a glass in his hand, and was looking at the far-off island.

"Blackman's Rock," said he, without removing his eye from the lens.

"Going to call there?"

"Call? No. I'm just checking the course I set yesterday. It's the last land we'll see till we make Callao."

"May I have a look?" asked Jerry, getting up and joining the little Captain. Clarity handed him the glass silently. We sat watching him. In the monotony of a sailing-ship life the tiniest incident looms up large. It seemed just then to us others,

as if there were something significant, noteworthy, about Jerry Dawson's action.

You see, we were accustomed—at least, I was—to Jerry's extraordinary feats of intuitive deduction. We were used to seeing his mind going ahead in leaps and bounds, while ours tramped stolidly after. I have always thought he owned something like a special sense—something that the fourth or fifth generation after ours no doubt will possess quite commonly, but that we do not even recognize when we see it, so rare it is among ourselves. If I might define it, I think it is a special form of radio-sensitiveness, an ability to receive impressions too faint for other minds. It has points in common with the work of artistic genius—in neither case can the possessor say how the thing is done.

If I had taken the glass, I should have seen just what Captain Clarity saw—a high, rocky island some ten miles away, with flights of birds winging toward it from many points of the compass. Jerry saw that, but he saw something more. He looked a long time through the glass, while I, and I fancy the others, continued to admire the poise of the perfect sailor, exhibited alike by Clarity and Dawson, who seemed to be growing like flowers up there on the plunging poop.

PRESENTLY Jerry lowered the glass, and handed it back.

"Captain," he said (and I knew at once he had a favor to ask; there is a tone comes into Jerry's voice sometimes that the very beasts of the field could not resist), "Captain—will you make a call at Blackman's Rock?"

"Now, Mr. Dawson," answered Clarity, "you know as well as I do what sort of a place that is—or don't you?"

"Rocky island about half a mile across, heavily wooded, a few palms, no inhabitants, no plantations," answered Jerry, who seemed to have the whole of the "Sailing Directions" in his head.

"No atoll, is it?"

"Certainly not. I don't expect news of anything there."

"What is it, then?"

"The birds."

"Birds! We aint out after birds, as I know. What do you want with them useless little beggars?"

"If you'll run us in, I'll tell you," answered Jerry. There is nothing he hates

so much on these occasions as being asked for reasons, partly because he usually hasn't any that he can define, partly because he thinks it is like your cheek to ask for them. I never said that he was an angel in a drill suit.

Clarity looked doubtful. In these days Ellis was taking a different position on the ship; he was inclined to make difficulties, to want why's and wherefore's for everything.

"What does the rest say?" asked the Captain, with a God-give-me-patience air. He shut up the telescope, and put it in his pocket. "You know," he added, "it'd keep us another day; I can't run no ships up to Blackman in the dark." He detached himself from us completely, as Jerry went down again to the main deck; I saw him staring at the sunset, and heard him warbling in his thin, high voice:

*"I thought I heard our old man say,
'Leave her, Johnny, leave her!
Time for us to leave her!'"*

Ysabel burst out, before anyone had time to speak:

"We must call—Rutland, I know you're dying to."

Rutland did not look as if he were dying to do anything, but Ysabel bore him down.

"Jerry smells an adventure, and so do I. Everyone says I'm a perfect adventuress. I simply must go. If you don't vote for it—"

"What'll you do if I don't?" asked Ellis, and I almost fancied I heard a threat in his voice. Ysabel! Ysabel! What hard, coarse hands were these, to win and hold you, you the "wicked," the "adventuress"—audacious innocent of all the innocents on earth!

"Oh, but we must!" was her answer, coupled to a flash from those long Spanish eyes that, years ago, must have fascinated the hardy little Captain in another face and other climes. And Rutland Stewart-Ellis, dropping suddenly back to the pulpy frame of mind that was his normal state, leered at her, and said: "Anything the señorita likes!" So it was settled.

AS I lay that night under the stars, feeling the ship glide slowly, and hearing the booms rattle across as we went about and about, on our cautious way toward land, I wondered much what all these

things might mean. I fell asleep without finding an answer.

With dawn, all speculation left me. I had something else to think about, and so had everyone else on the schooner. Blackman's Rock was wrecked.

The hurricane that had touched us at Hala-Hari with its bare outer edge had here struck hard, full blade, and done its worst. That must, I reckoned, have been a good many weeks ago; but the island was still lying prone, destroyed, scarce a scrap of green showing among the uprooted trees. It looked as if a fire had passed over it, so brown and red, so tindery, were the piled-up masses of leaf and branch and root, all tangled together in an incredible mass of destruction. With the hurricane, evidently, had come a tidal wave that had swept far inland, bringing with it seaweedy boulders and masses of mushroom coral from the sea. These, cast at random among the bristling boughs, were strangely disconcerting; like the cracks in solid earth that remain after an earthquake, they spoke, mutely, of uncertainty, impermanence, in the forces on which we reckon as we reckon upon night and day.

WE had run so close to the island that all these things could be seen quite clearly as the schooner coasted along the open beach. We could see, too, that the birds which had interested Jerry were still coming, in steady, converging streams, from every quarter of the sky. They seemed to alight somewhere in the middle of the wrecked forest, and stay there.

"I reckon you was wrong, Mr. Dawson," said Clarity, spinning the wheel in his hands.

"Yes?" answered Jerry. "How?"

Clarity turned the piece of tobacco he was chewing, and spat deftly over the ship's side.

"I reckon you thought them birds was goin' to a wreck," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "You aint the only one on this ship that can make guesses."

"Yes?" repeated Jerry deferentially.

"But you see, there aint any place for a wreck, Mr. Dawson. I could 'a' told you that, if you'd 'a' asked me. Ships that wrecks here—and there's been one or two—always wrecks on this side, and the steep-to rocks there just slides them off into deep water right away. Hark at that!"

We were silent, and listened. Through the noise of the sails, and the noise of the water under the ship's forefoot, came with strange loudness the voice of certain tiny waves breaking upon the iron face of rock. Small though they were, they struck furiously, and well they might, for each had the power of three thousand miles of sea behind it, driven like a hammer by the forces of the trades.

"Breaks them up when they've 'it, and sweeps them away like feathers of a fowl what you've plucked for the Sunday dinner," explained Clarity. "You can guess what it's like when there's anything of a sea on, which luckily there isn't today. Well, are you for landing?"

He asked as a man asks who is sure of refusal; but Jerry only said, "Yes, please," and went over to the davits where the whaleboat hung. There was silence for a moment; the sails slatted, the foam giggled under the ship's side; the small strange fury of the waves wreaked itself, tiger-clawing the rocks. Then Clarity barked out his orders, and the boat lowered away.

We landed as one lands on many islands—backing about in the whaleboat, leaping when a lucky chance occurred. Everyone got ashore safely except Jerry; he, unfortunately, put his foot on a piece of seaweed and fell back into the water. He was out again in a minute, but we had to wait, strolling among the rocks ashore, while the boat went back to fetch his only other suit of clean clothes, and while he got behind a boulder and changed into it. We hadn't had a washing day for some time, owing to want of water, so no one was surprised to see him come forth smartly attired in the R. N. R. uniform he had worn in the war, gold buttons, stripes and all. The native sent for it had even brought the sword; Jerry put it on, with a comic gesture.

"If we meet *Man Friday*," he said, "I hope we'll impress him properly."

THEN he led us right up the rocky hill that overlooked the raffle of uprooted trees and wind-burned foliage. It was tough climbing, but we all went our hardest; I got left, was waited for, struggled on again, got left again, and finally gave in to follow after the rest, since I could see that no one wanted to stop. Everybody, without a word, was expecting things—interesting things—to happen.

There was a little hump of pure rock on the top of the hill; the others, well ahead of me, reached it, rounded it, and then raised a shout that made me, stumbling in the rear, curse silently to myself. All of them at once began talking together; bits of their conversation floated down to me; it seemed to be about a ship—a ship? I looked ahead. Yes, there was a ship—a dirty-looking little tramp steamer, not very far off the island; she must have come up behind it while we were lying off the rocky coast, getting our boat out. But what was there about a little tramp to call for shrieks of joy? Besides, they weren't looking at her. I nearly burst my lungs—which don't hold so much as yours do—in the struggle up the last steep bit.

And another ship there was, lying on her side right in the middle of the forest.

Many a time since, I have seen that sight in dreams, and it scarce appeared more unreal than it did the first time I saw it, with my bodily eyes, in clear morning light. I knew the thing to be possible; I had read of vessels transported inland, by hurricanes and tidal waves, before now. But I hadn't quite believed it.

WELL, there it was—a steamer of about four hundred tons, lying on her side, her masts snapped off, her funnel pitched away into the bush. Her black side swelling upward like the belly of some thrown beast, filled the whole glade below us; she looked as big as a Cunarder, and as impossible as a dinotherium.

The steel decks had stood; they rose unbroken as a wall, from groves of tree-fern that sprang up like green umbrellas. Here in the rock-shaded interior of the island there had been some recovery from the hurricane; besides the tree-fern, creepers, sappy, snakelike, with poisonous-looking flowers of flesh-red, were beginning to crawl about the wreck, and orchids, on the trunks of fallen trees, had sent out sprays of blossoms white as rice. I remember how these smelled; the perfume, languid, sensuous, soaked up through the warm air to us, mingled with acrid scents of rotting grain. There had been grain on board, sacks of wheat, apparently some special seed kind, to judge by the look of the bags. This had spilled out through a smashed hatchway; it lay in pools among the creeper, fought over by squawking gulls and man-of-war birds.

Not much longer would those small

guides be able to show the way; not much more food would they garner from the bags of picked hard wheat. Give Blackman's Rock a little time, and it would cover up its crimes. By the end of next northwest season, an airplane hovering above would see nothing but leaf and tree-top; an exploring party, hacking through below, would find fungi, rusting iron, and masses of vegetable debris covering decay.

But we were in time. Jerry's wireless had done its work. I do not know—I think he did not know himself—what swift mental process, working from data imperceptible to the ordinary sense, had convinced him that a wreck was lying hidden on an island where no wreck ever before had been known to rest. The bird-flights were but a hint; birds may mean many things, at sea—nesting season, fruit harvest somewhere, guano island, old or in the making; nothing at all, perhaps, but some islet that is the only resting-place in a wide stretch of sea. Blackman's Rock might have been any, or all, of these things.

Instead it was treasure, fortune. There was no knowing—yet—what that black prone hull might not contain. Certainly there would be food, enough to take us to the end of our quest, however long it might be. So, hey for Marooner's Ring again, and the lost gold crowns that we were going to find!

THAT was the thought in everybody's mind. I know I felt like Blackbeard or Paul Jones; I could have set my teeth upon a dagger, and, muttering, "Sdeath!" have plunged, a pistol in each hand, to the sacking of the wreck, if half a hundred guards had stood between.

But there were no guards, living or dead—not even some poor sailor lifting a skeleton hand from among the flesh-red blossoms of the creeper, and the green parasols of tree-fern. The deck had been razed bare, and with the swept-off deck-houses, shorn rails, and wheel cut away, had gone, no doubt, the captain and the crew, in that terrific send of the tidal wave that had cast up the steamer where never ship's keel had plowed before. You could not have seen her from the shore of the island anywhere, so well the giant wave had done its work. Yards high, up-rooted trees had been piled behind her, as the wave went down. She lay in a basin of

shattered timber, out of which her screw would never work her, her rudder steer her, until the Judgment Day. Somewhere, deep in the surrounding seas, the bones of those who had traveled in her must now be lying, scattered, beneath the moving shadows of great whales, and the mile-long, tremulous fingers of fucus weed. They were dead; we were alive, and today their goods were ours.

YOU may imagine we were not long in scrambling down the cliff side, and flinging ourselves upon our prey. More like a giant beast than ever she seemed, as we came up to her through the tangles of flower and fern—it is incredible, how huge a mere four hundred tonner can look, when you take her and dump her down in the middle of a forest garden. We ran round the great black flank of her, and came upon the wall of deck; out of it, a hatchway, with cover drooping broken gaped black and mysterious, high up. The dribble of grain seemed to have come forth from this; a sack or two still hung on the lip of the opening, pecked and stained by birds. These latter, by the way, were amazingly bold; they kept squawking and diving after the food, within a few feet of our hands, and seemed not at all afraid. We could have knocked them down with sticks.

"Men aren't common on this island—maybe not landed for half a century," suggested Jerry. "What we want now is a balk of timber or two, to make steps up into the hatch. She's not a grain-ship; there'll be other things. Those bags are marked 'Seed.'"

Ysabel, following close behind him with Rutland Stewart-Ellis as usual in the background, hitched up her duck trousers in a nautical way, and began softly humming to a tune of her own, something about, "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest—"

"Do you think there'll be bottles of rum?" she demanded. "There ought to be; it sounds right."

"Bottles of gin, more likely," answered Ellis. "Hope to God there'll be a case or two of Scotch."

"There should be," suggested Ysabel, "an iron-bound chest, with pieces-of-eight in it, and a parrot, left alone in the wreck, which'll cry out, 'Mac, where are ye?' because it belonged to the chief engineer."

"Do you reckon the engineers got away,

or were shut up at the last?" I asked of Jerry Dawson. He paused a moment in his work of selecting light trunks of timber, went up to the ship again, and stood just under a small shattered window that represented the engine room hatchway. For a moment or two he did not speak.

"Got away and drowned with the rest," he said presently, and went back to the tree-trunks. "Here, Ellis, give a hand."

"How on earth do you know?"

He looked to see that Ysabel was not within hearing.

"Used my nose," he said coolly. "Heave her up—that's it."

"This is fun," I said anticipatively, as the big trunk of timber was set in place. "Lord, what luck! What jolly luck! Who's going first?"

It was jolly luck, and I never felt happier in my life, and the whole world seemed my toy. We all felt like that. And then I looked up, by chance, at the slope we had descended, ten minutes earlier. And I saw five men, five smallish, dirty, odd-looking men, coming along it.

I SUPPOSE I turned all sort of colors. Ellis and Jerry, who had their backs to the slope, saw my face. Ellis merely gaped, but Jerry's head was round in a flash, and instantly he saw what I had seen. I won't repeat what he said; it was brief and pointed, and just fitted to the occasion, and it was nicely toned not to catch Ysabel's ears.

"Ysabel," he said to her immediately, "get behind the stern, and stay there for a bit." She went, with amazing meekness.

Ellis said it was a pretty kettle of fish, and looked indignantly at the rest of us, as if we were to blame—one of his annoying little ways.

I said I had seen a steamer, a small one, but didn't think it mattered.

Jerry thought that the vessel had run in out of curiosity, seeing our ship, and wondering what she was up to. They would probably have steamed round to the other side, where the *Lady Macquarie* was, and never found us, if we had not made such a noise, crashing down the hill, and shouting. That had brought the men right on to us.

"The thing's done anyhow," he said. "I'll tackle them as well as I can, if the rest of you play up."

"What do you reckon they are?" I asked in a low tone. The men were mak-

ing straight for us and the wreck. They had a half-sly, half-defiant air: they were somewhat warmly dressed, in thick "bom-bacho" trousers, narrowed to the ankle, and heavy, dirty shirts. Most of them had sashes round their waists, and I saw knife and pistol hilts in these. I do not think any of the men had shaved for a week or two; their blue-black cheeks and chins, together with their dress, gave them an absurd piratical air. I could hardly believe they were real, they looked so like something off the stage. But Jerry and Rutland Stewart-Ellis had seen wild life in strange places; they seemed to know a good deal about the strangers, at first sight, and not to like what they saw.

"Patagonian, I should say," ventured Jerry. "Most of the hard cases from Brazil and the Argentine drift down there. Saw a murderers' camp year before the war, where there wasn't a man who wouldn't have been garrotted if the police could have got him."

"Probably these blighters are making from some Chileño port to Australia."

"Going to fight them?" demanded Ellis cheerfully. "I've a sailor's knife, and there's your sword."

"Not much good, with five to three. I'll try a bluff first, anyhow. Remember I'm the Official Receiver of Wrecks for Peru. This uniform ought to pass; I reckon they've never seen any of the big officials near at hand."

"Is there such a person?"

"Of course. He owns this wreck, as a matter of fact; Blackman's Rock is Peruvian. We don't propose to call him in, but he's a real official, all right. Thank the Lord I can speak Spanish like a native. Let's shut up now; they're too near."

WE waited, and I may say the waiting was not pleasant; far too like that wait in the dentist's anteroom, with the rival patients pretending to read *Punch* and watching the door. We watched the strangers, and pretended not to be interested. They had scrambled down the cliff by now, and were crashingly stepping forward through the withered brush, with a high dancing movement that was almost funny. One of them, a bit bigger and a bit dirtier than the rest, came a little forward, and seemed about to speak.

"St!" came a low, insistent signal from the shelter of the vessel's stern. "St!"

I turned round, and saw the tip of a

pink finger beckoning. Clearly, Ysabel wanted me. I didn't remember that she had ever wanted me before. I was not slow to take the opportunity, though I could have wished that it had come at another time.

SHE was hidden away round the corner of the stern-post, and she seemed impatient about something.

"What a time you were!" she whispered. "Give me your coat and shoes and hat—quick, quick!"

"What do you—"

"Give them—" she pulled my wide Panama off my head, flung down her own fanciful straw, and tucked up the ends of her hair closely underneath the other. I had kicked off my shoes by now, and stood amidst of the thorny creepers shod merely in gray cotton socks, wondering greatly. She dropped the little black Oxfords she wore—miraculously short and narrow—and swiftly laced her feet into my shoes, which are smallish, but nothing out of the way. She almost pulled my coat off, and buttoned it about her own graceful figure, over the silk shirt. She stuck a cigarette into the corner of her mouth, put on a slightly swaggering demeanor, and set her feet wide apart—and behold, a Spanish youth of about sixteen, cheeky, handsome and entirely convincing.

Out she went, with the hat a little on one side, well over her glowing eyes; one hand on her hip, and the cigarette puffing. I was thankful, then, that my small knowledge of Spanish, mostly picked up from Jerry, was enough to give me some idea of what passed. Ysabel began by saluting Jerry, stiffly, with her heels together. Then she bowed to the strangers, just raising the brim of her hat.

"Can we be of any use to you, señores?" she demanded. "My chief and I are occupied, as you see, taking over this wreck in the name of the Republic of Peru."

"Your chief, señor?" asked the foremost man, in a guttural tone that I recognized—with relief—to be Portuguese. These fellows would not be too critical over a point of style.

"Si, señor, at your service. The Official Receiver of Wrecks for the distinguished Republic of Peru and its noble President. I have the honor to be his official Secretary."

The newcomers looked troubled and

suspicious. I saw them eying Jerry's buttons, his cap, his sword.

"It is a remarkable wreck, señor," said the leading ruffian, staring like a hawk. "Without doubt, an *Americano* ship, full of much valuables."

"Without doubt, señores. She is full of very valuable grain, as you can see." They looked a little disappointed at this—doubtful, also, as if they would like to go through the hull and make sure. "It is fortunate for the Republic of Peru," went on Jerry, "that I received information, and hurried here at once, in the first ship that could be got. It is also fortunate for you, señores, that you have been saved from getting yourselves into trouble by meddling with Government property. Some have been garrotted for less."

HE spoke with grave severity. I could see the men were puzzled, impressed. They shuffled about, and spat, uncomfortably. Ysabel meanwhile played secretary, standing with her arms stiff down at her sides, and her eyes meekly fixed upon Jerry.

There was some muttering among the men, and then one of them, staring at Jerry's imposing buttons and sword, said, uncertainly, that he had not seen any papers. Government officials, he suggested, did have papers—commissions.

"Señor," said Ysabel, bowing, "shall I fetch your commission from your dispatch case? It is there, in the blue envelope."

A flash of intelligence seemed to pass between them. Jerry nodded. The minx went off, hand on hip, cigarette puffing, to all appearance as handsome and audacious a boy as you might find from Punta Arenas to Panama.

We waited.

"Ask them where they're from," suggested Ellis.

"Gallegos, Patagonia," was the reply to Jerry's translation. "We have been herding sheep there, señor." (The man stared so hard as he spoke that I felt instinctively he was lying.) "We are working our passage from Mejellones in Chili with nitrates to Australia, where we shall herd sheep again. We landed here for water."

"How much of that's true?" queried Ellis.

"Places correct," answered Jerry, "but I rather reckon they're gentry in trouble, clearing out. Better not talk."

There was accordingly silence for a

good while. The men, I noticed, did not keep still; they shuffled about, in an apparently aimless fashion, that nevertheless seemed to bring them always a little nearer to each other, and to us.

It seemed long before Ysabel returned, but I dare say it was not more than twenty minutes, until we heard her swift step among the dry leaves. She arrived, panting a little, saluted Jerry, handed over a blue envelope, and then, in obedience to his curt command, started back, apparently, to the ship.

But I saw the gleam of her—my—white coat in a thicket not far away, and I do not think she missed much of what followed.

When Jerry, with a warning glance under his eyelids, unfolded the paper, and began to read, I could have screamed with laughter, had I dared. I had seen that paper before.

It was long, stiff, and official-looking. On the port side it had a red printed seal, and on the starboard side a black. It was printed in black and red, with underlinings and big Gothic capitals. On the whole, it looked extremely well—to anyone who did not know that it was Jerry's Lloyd's insurance policy for his special baggage.

"Señores, does any one of you know English?" he demanded, still in the Spanish tongue. "This commission is, of course, in English, because it refers to an *Americano* wreck; that explains itself."

Of course it did not, but no one saw that.

"I spee-ek Engleese. How-ya-do. Good night," offered one of the Patagonians.

"I imagine all you know wont hurt you," replied Jerry. He had spoken in English this time, but the man merely bowed, and said, "Si, señor!" He, as well as the others, leaned forward now, listening hard to Jerry. They looked funnier than ever, grouped in that all-together theatrical fashion, but there was no laughter in me now, for I realized that Jerry was putting up the biggest bluff of his career; that he was fighting, with just a bit of paper, and his own matchless nerve, for the continuance of our treasure trip, the fortune of Marooner's Ring; last, not least, the fate and marriage of Ysabel.

IN a monotonous, clear tone, he read aloud selections from the policy. The men listened. Above all, the fellow who had said he knew English, listened hard, strain-

ingly, trying to catch something he might understand. . . . I had never realized before what a stately, incomprehensible, splendid thing a Lloyd's policy is. It almost hypnotized me—hearing the impressive words rolled out—into believing that the paper was really an official document protecting, under innumerable penalties, our treasure-trove of a wreck.

“By whatsoever other name or names the same ship or the master thereof shall be named or called; beginning the Adventure upon the said Goods and Merchandises from the loading thereof aboard the same Ship, and shall so continue or endure—”

I can see it all this moment—the hurrah's-nest of tangled and broken timber; the ship, incredibly stranded in the midst of it, Dawson, his broad tanned neck and sleek hair turned toward me, reading away; those five Patagonian ruffians, in their stagy “bombacho” trousers, and sombreros, staring, staring with black boot-button eyes; turning away to spit now and then, with coarse hawking noises in their throats, that somehow sounded contemptuous. Was he carrying off his bluff? And if he wasn't, what was going to happen? We were two men—and a half—unarmed save for one knife and a sword. They were five, with knives and revolvers. In truth the odds looked ugly.

Jerry was going on:

“Touching the Adventures and Perils which we the Assurers are content to bear and do take upon us this voyage, they are—” He paused, and looked severely at the five Patagonians, then went on, in a loud baritone: “They are—of the seas, Men of War, Fire, Enemies, Pirates, Rovers, Thieves, Jettisons, Letters of Mart and Counter Mart Surprisals, Restraints of all Kings, Princes and People, of what Nation, Condition, or Quality soever; Barratry of the Master and Mariners, and all Perils, Losses, and Misfortunes, that have or shall come to the Hurt, Detriment, or Damage of said Goods and Merchandise and Ship, or any Part thereof.

“And it is especially declared and agreed,” he went on, in a warning tone, “that no acts of the Insurer in recovering, saving or preserving the Property insured shall be considered as a waiver or acceptance of abandonment.”

He concluded with a flourish of trumpets:

“Warranted free from any claim based

upon loss of, or frustration on the insured voyage or adventure, caused by arrests, restraints, or detentions of Kings, Princes or People.”

“Now, señores,” he said, “you can look at my commission.” He handed over the paper with a bow.

THE man who had claimed knowledge of English accepted it with a deeper bow, looked at it, and passed it on. All looked at it, passing it from one to another. The last man handed it back, bowing, and at the same time scowling as I really do not think any villain, outside of Los Angeles, can ever have scowled before.

The English-speaking Patagonian, standing ahead of the others, stared at the ship, stared at Jerry, and Ellis, and myself—I will swear, also, stared at the little white gleam in the bush some rods away, that was Ysabel—and then remarked:

“Señor, all right!” Gathering himself together, with an immense sigh, he followed up with, “Señor, so long!”

He faced his countrymen, and addressing them as various unprintable and unpleasant things, bade them briefly to follow him. One by one, they climbed up the rocks again; one by one they disappeared along the ridge. We waited a while, and then Jerry went up to reconnoiter.

“Keep Ysabel out of the way a bit longer,” he said.

It was some little while before he signaled, raising his arms.

“All away!” he cried.

Ysabel was the first up the slope; I was the last, because she had forgotten to give me back my shoes, although she tossed my coat to me, as you throw a bone to a dog. When I reached the seaward side of the hill, I saw the dirty little black-and-red steamer ploughing away, bow pointed for Australia. It was high noon; high tropic noon, with a diamond dance of sun on pale blue sea, with a joyous immensity of space, and light, such as no dweller north or south of the 'twenties ever may know.

PEOPLE do dance for joy, sometimes. Ysabel danced there, in the little space of sun-dried grass at the top of the hill, setting to Jerry, and lifting a delicate curved arm at him, while she snapped her fingers in lieu of castanets. I saw a faint

Indian-red creep under his eyes, lightening the bronze of his hard cheek; he caught the challenge, and flung into the dance with her.

Ellis stood looking at the pair, sucking his eternal cigar; his full, deep-colored face showed no feeling whatsoever. By and by he turned his back on the dancers, and remarked to me: "It'll take some opening up."

I followed his eyes to the wreck, and not much to my surprise saw the small, wiry figure of Captain Clarity down there, strolling about, his hands in his pockets.

SOMETHING in the look of the little Captain worried me, though I could not have defined it. He seemed too cool. He should have been exulting, like the rest of us. After all, it meant just as much to him. The news, carried by Ysabel, when she hurriedly invaded the ship to help Jerry out with that amazing piece of bluff, had brought Clarity away to the wreck. By now, he must have known that the trip was saved; that the small steamer—*Americano*, as those queer lots from Patagonia had justly classed her—was full of tinned and bottled food. Even I knew so much. Chili's imports from the rich country of Upper California run to huge figures annually. This little ship was clearly, by her make and style, one of the many small freighters that take their share of the trade. I didn't expect Clarity to dance, as his daughter was doing, but he might have shouted out something cheerful, joined us on top. Whereas, he stayed down there, waiting, and saying nothing.

I suppose Jerry felt what I felt. At any rate, he stopped the dance, with a sweeping reverence to Ysabel, and ran down to fetch her shoes—she had kicked off mine when she first began swaying and stepping the measure of the fandango. I hastily retrieved my property and went back to the wreck. While Jerry and Ysabel were descending together, the little Captain stood with his back to the great dark mass of the ship, humming one of his eternal chanties:

Shenandoah, I love your daughter,
Away, you rolling river!

"Jacky goes by contraries," I heard Ysabel confiding to Jerry, as he unnecessarily helped her elastic, trousered slim-

ness over small rocks and easy descents. "He always sings 'Shenandoah' when he's vexed with me. You see, I told him nothing about those Dagoes; Jack's too like Georgy Washington to help you out with a game like that. If he's heard about them from the crew or anyone—"

"I don't think that's what's vexed him," said Jerry, taking the last few yards at a run.

"Well, Captain, what do you think of this?" he hailed Clarity cheerfully.

The Captain changed his tune, beating lightly with one toe as he sang:

Sally Brown, she's a bright mulatto,
... She drinks rum and chews tobacco,
Spend my money on Sally Brown!

"Think? I don't think; I leave that to you, Mr. Dawson. What I see's enough for me. She's the *Catalina* of San Francisco."

We had all noticed so much; the name was clearly painted.

"When I was last in 'Frisco," went on Clarity, still lightly tapping with his foot, "she belonged to the Montezuma Company. They used her for their own cargo, down South American ports. Always the same cargo."

"Was it food?" demanded Ellis, with tense interest.

"Oh yes, it was food all right."

"Ah!"—cheerfully.

"It was jam," said Captain Clarity, with an entire absence of expression.

WE thought of everything you have thought of. There was no lazarette. The officers' and sailors' food had been carried in the swept-away deck-houses. The grain—a few bags of seed—had been so pulled about by birds that a starving Bolshevik wouldn't have touched it.

We gutted the ship. Case after case we broke open.

Strawberry, raspberry, gooseberry, blackberry, loganberry, apricot, peach, plum, melon. . . . Jam, and jam. Some of the cases were broken; a good many tins had burst. We took two cases on board, and sailed away.

Under the rising moon, as we left the island, Ysabel leaned upon the rail, looking thoughtfully behind.

"They do these things better in the pictures," she sighed.

"The Singing Ghost," another fine story in this series by Beatrice Grimshaw, will appear in the next, the February, issue.



Efficiency Oscar

Wherein the bright mechanic of the Skinner Garage goes in for production plus—and a pleasant time is had by all.

By CALVIN BALL

I DON'T like to have any boss wearing sneakers around a shop I am in, especially such a boss as Herman. This being a country garage on the main highway with a parade of tourists always passing, there's enough work dumped into it in one day to overcome a ordinary good mechanic, but no matter how much piles up on me the only way Herman helps along is by gum-shoeing over the premises watching to see if I keep busy. He never touched a wrench since I been here.

From where I was working in the pit under a car I could now see him standing quiet on the other side the room, fiddling with his watch chain and squinting in my direction. As he didn't say a word when he came in, I figured he must be up to his old trick of slipping around like a shadow trying to catch me killing time. It made me mad to think about it.

Pulling out my watch I gives it a slant at it and saw that it was already three minutes past quitting time. Herman has a habit of easing over to where I am working and notifying me when it's time to knock off for the day, and I now won-

dered had I better wait for him to say something or should I better crawl out and be independent. Shoving the hammer and chisel into the tool box, I rolls over and lights a cigarette.

When I heard the floor boards creak I twists my neck for a upward look and there he was standing at the edge of the pit looking down at me.

"Is that you under there, Ed?" he asks.

For a second I didn't answer. I wondered did he have a idea it might be some outside mechanic sneaking in to do his work while he aint looking.

"It's me," I says finally.

"You smoking under there?"

"It's a cigarette," I answered.

"You know I don't advocate smoking in the pit."

Taking another puff and blowing the smoke out where he could see it, I cocked one eye at him around the side of a tire.

"Maybe if you sniffed the ventilation down here you would then start advocating," I says. "Blowing a little smoke around purifies the atmosphere."

"Tha's all right, Ed. You get too close

to that gas tank and there'll be so much smoke blowing around here we won't have any atmosphere. You might as well knock off, Ed. You don't seem to be doing much lately, and I better have a little talk with you."

I CRAWLED out of the pit and faces him. I am not a easy-mark, and as Herman has been pussyfoot spying on me long enough, I figured it was time him and me come to an understanding, and I find out whether or not I'm going to get that half-day off to attend the Grand Firemen's Picnic.

"I also got a little something to say," I states. "You notice that for a few weeks I been working pretty hard, Herman."

"No, I didn't notice it," Herman answers, opening his eyes wide.

"You been watching close enough so you ought to," I says. "It's past quitting time now, aint it?"

"Two minutes past," Herman replies, looking at his watch. "What you want to say to me, Ed?"

I looks him square in the eye and didn't wink. "I want to talk about getting next Thursday afternoon off."

Herman squints at me, and for a second didn't speak.

"You want Thursday afternoon off?"

"That's what I figured on."

Herman continues thumbing his watch chain.

"Ed, I can't do it," he refuses finally.

"Why can't you?"

He drops the chain and coughs a couple of times, stretching his neck up out of his collar.

"Look at here, Ed. We don't need to mention about how hard you work, because lately you have let so much work pile up ahead of you that at last I have had to take action."

"What kind of action?" I asked.

"I had to go into Junction City and hire a new mechanic to help you out."

This news was a surprise to me.

"You hired a extra mechanic?"

"Tha's what I had to do."

"This is handsome of you, Herman," I says.

"It cost me money, Ed. I am bringing this mechanic here as a good example for you. He is a kind of mechanic you don't see often. He works full time and hard, and he don't start twenty minutes late in the morning."

"Are you hinting about somebody now?"

"Tha's all right, Ed. The new mechanic I have got is a young one but he is a swift expert, and his policy is to work more hours than he gets paid."

"This must be a new kind of policy," I says. "I never heard of it. Where did you corral this kind of cuckoo?"

"I found him in town, and didn't lose any time in bringing him out here. He's now in the front yard waiting."

"Maybe he is in the front yard working," I says. "Is that him I hear hammering out there?"

"That's him," Herman admits. "While he's waiting he fills in time with work."

"What's he working at?"

"He is fixing that gas platform which I have been mentioning to you a good many times."

Herman leads the way over to the front door.

"There he is," he points. "Look at him work. You want to treat him right, Ed. He is kind of young, and he don't talk very much, but that is because he aint got time. I am going upstairs to see about supper, so it would be a good idea for you to talk it over with him, and also bring him up to eat."

"What's his name?" I says, skeptical.

"His name is Oscar."

WHILE Herman waddles back to the stairs I gives Oscar the once over. He's already got his hat and coat off, with his sleeves rolled up; and the action he is going through nailing boards on the gas platform is a fright. I figured he must be about twenty-one, and from the looks of him I wouldn't claim he is dumb. While he works I could see his tongue stick between his teeth and his eyes bulging out he's so anxious to get something done fast. Walking over to where he was I stops beside him. He was that busy slamming at nails, he didn't look up to see me. Never lost a motion.

"Are you the one named Oscar?" I inquired.

"I am Oscar," he answers brisk, not looking up to see who I am.

"Well, I sure will say, Oscar, you are not losing any time getting started on this job. Maybe you don't know it is already quitting hour."

"When supper is ready," he answers, shoving a handful of nails into his mouth where he could reach them faster, "you

could holler to me and I will then run up to eat."

I picks my teeth with a jackknife blade I got in my hand, and the way I eyed this cuckoo was a corker.

"Maybe you had better not stop to eat," I says, "as you could get more work done if you don't stop for meals. How much is Herman figuring on paying you?"

He makes a quick grab into a bucket for a new supply of nails, poking a handful into his mouth with his left hand while he keeps the right mitt busy shoving more boards into place.

"I'm not worrying about how much I get paid," he mumbles through the nails. "What I am worrying about is work. That is my policy. There's already too many in this land thinking about how much they get paid instead of thinking about how much work they do. I got a book about it which I will read you some of it later."

"Maybe you wont have time," I says. "Is it your policy to sleep nights like other citizens, or do you work double shifts?"

"People don't need so much sleep as you think," he claims, slamming harder at the nails. "Five or six hours is plenty. Inventors live on it, and burn midnight oil. Success comes from pounding on continuous."

"If success comes from pounding nails continuous, you ought to be a knock-out," I answers. "I don't want to tear you away from your work, but they must now have supper ready, and whenever you feel like you could spare a few minutes you could show up in the dining-room on the floor above."

Turning around I walks back through the garage toward the stairs. I never saw it to fail yet that whenever I am about to touch Herman for a half-day off, something like this has got to happen.

HERMAN has been trying hard to get more work out of me, and as he is a shrewd one I can see he figures I will now have to speed up or this new cuckoo's fast work will make me look like a has-been. I don't take a back seat for no mechanic, and there is none that can swing a wrench any faster than myself, but on the other hand I am not one of the kind who believes in overwork, and I certainly didn't like the idea of Herman having a chance to compare me with any streak of lightning like the pace-maker he has now wished on me for a running-mate.

Upstairs in the dining-room I found Herman, and also the daughter Caroline where she was getting supper on the table. As Caroline is one who is going to be my fiancée, if I work it right, she is the main reason why I hold down this country garage job where I can be like one of the family.

"Yes sir," Herman was saying when I pops into the room, "that new boy down there is a wonder. He's already got the gas-pump platform fixed which I have been dinning about to Ed for three weeks straight."

THIS was certainly putting me in a bad light with Caroline, and I see I've stepped into the room just in time.

"Herman," I interrupts, "when have I had time to fix this platform?"

Herman rubs his chin and rolls his eyes around at me.

"I didn't see you there, Ed. Let it go then. But the platform didn't get fixed."

"Maybe," says Caroline, "that a hustler like this new one will be a good example for Ed. Everybody should be a hard worker if they are going to make a mark in this life, and from the way this new one is hammering, he must know the way to hustle."

Herman raps on the window, and I could hear Oscar holler back that he heard him. While Caroline stands by the table looking back and forth from Herman to me, the door opens and Oscar walks in rapid.

"Is the meal ready?" he asks, making a bee line for the corner where he sees the wash-basin and the sink.

"You still got a minute or two," I says. "Maybe you better go back and drive another nail. There's a towel on the hook."

Oscar made quick time going through the motions of a fast wash, and then slides into a chair that Caroline has pulled out ready. As he sets down he whisks a book from under his coat and pushes it across the table.

"Anybody could profit and read a little of that," he suggests, talking to Herman, but meaning me. "It gives a idea about garage efficiency and how big men succeed by hard work."

"If you mean me," I says, "then you better look again as I am not a big man but one of small size, and in this garage you don't need any book to get a idea about hard work."

Caroline gives me a frozen stare.

"Never scoff at one who reads books," she advises me. "Maybe you better instead use him as a model."

"You aint got the right spirit, Ed," Herman puts in, wiggling his fork at me.

I COULD see how things was turning, and that this slick article now eating before me was certainly worming his way into the family's good favor.

While I eats, Oscar gets busy talking, waving his hands between forkfuls, and explaining about how we should make success.

"A man has got to be up on his toes," he recites, "and smash his way through success."

"Now that there is the proper kind of spirit," Herman compliments.

"If a man is short of ambition," Oscar adds on, looking at me from the end of his eye, "I would advise a little reading from a book like this, and then practice what it preaches."

"Excuse me," I says. "I aint so stuck on work that I gotta read about it nights, and I got a chair in the corner with a newspaper. When I want to read there is plenty of pictures, as the paper I take comes in diagrams, and it don't mention about work."

I plumps myself down into the corner and shut my ears off from a painful conversation. My face is buried down in a picture column for a while forgetting about what's going on, when I hears a hammer banging in the garage down below. I looks up and sees Herman sitting back in the chair smoking contented while Caroline clears up the table, but I notices Oscar has already took a sneak. For a minute I caught my breath wondering if the hammering downstairs could mean that this working weasel has gone back to the job.

"Where is Oscar?" I inquires, looking at Herman.

"Downstairs," he answers.

"What's he doing downstairs?"

"Working. Don't you hear him? I mentioned to him about that busted differential job, and he's already down there at it. I told him he should better wait until tomorrow, but he says his policy is, never put a thing off till tomorrow because you better do it today. There's what I call a good man."

I stands up and plops the paper down on the floor.

"Look here, Herman," I says. "Are

you hinting about I aint a good man because I don't work night and day? If this new one is such a humdinger that he wants to eat up work, then let him go ahead, but it aint going to be a example for me, as I am not built that way."

Herman puffs on his cheroot and peeks at me through the smoke like he has got a idea I am trying to skin out of work. Caroline throws me another iceberg look.

"If you took advantage of such a young man's good influence," she puts in, "it would be lucky for you that he came."

"The way he is lucky to me," I answers, "is like when a black cat crosses my bridge before you come to it. I been hearing enough about this wonder for one day, and I am going to bed."

WITHOUT making any good-night remarks, I goes to my room, seven by nine feet, and under the eaves. It's not a habit for me to hit the hay immediate after supper, but I got a temper in me when it once gets stirred, and I figured it would be a good plan to show them how I looked at this game.

For a hour I was there with my eyes wide open, listening to the pounding going on downstairs and what I was thinking about Oscar would have made his hair stand on end if he could heard it. I don't mind having somebody around to do the work, but when any buzzard like this comes crowing about it with books at meal-time and then makes a grandstand play by working while I'm in bed, it certainly is not going to make me any more solid with Caroline.

On the other hand if I now went downstairs and worked along with him he would still get the credit for making me. Any way I looked at it it was a bad break for myself, and before I went to sleep I was already wondering if maybe I couldn't sail a hammer in this speeder's direction tomorrow and make it look like a accident.

I went to sleep, but as Oscar had been given the spare room next to mine he has to walk through my quarters on his way to bed. About twelve o'clock I wakes up in the dark hearing somebody sneaking through the room.

"Hi, there!" I hisses. "Who is it?"

"Oscar," he whispers back. "I'm going to bed."

"You don't mean it," I says. "Aint you cutting your day short? What time is it?"

He strikes a light and holds it up.

"Fifteen to twelve," he says.

"Do you mean to say you're just knocking off work?"

"No, I quit fifteen minutes ago. I finished up that job tonight so that we could start with a clean slate with something else in the morning."

"Why don't you start with a clean slate at something else now," I says, "as it is so near morning it aint worth while waiting. What you twisting at there?"

"A alarm clock," he answers.

For a minute I wondered wouldn't the best way be to grab up that crowbar I had in the corner and end this thing up right here.

"Oscar," I says, "don't you know that you don't need any alarm clock around this dump? Herman routs everybody out so early that we have breakfast at seven-thirty sharp."

"Ha!"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I'll see you at breakfast time then. Seven o'clock, eh! Ha!"

THE rattling of Oscar's alarm clock woke me up in the morning, and when I see it is not yet daylight I tossed back the quilts and jumped over to his door.

"Choke off that fire-alarm," I snaps.

While I am talking he strikes a match and holds it down so he could see the time.

"You mean to say you are rolling out at five-thirty!" I gasps, fixing my eyes on the alarmer.

Squaring himself around on the bed he reaches for his pants.

"That's my policy," he states. "Now if you want it I could leave you one of my books so you could read some before breakfast. That's the way I got started."

"If you don't want to get damaged past repairing you better get started out of this room," I says, "and don't lose any time."

When I got out to the breakfast table at seven-thirty, Oscar was already in the corner washing up, and from the way he is covered with black smudges nobody could make a mistake about he has been downstairs at work. Caroline is flipping back and forth from the kitchen casting approving looks in Oscar's direction, and Herman is steaming up a new cheroot, with a smile spread over him from ear to ear. This deal was by now getting on my nerves.

"Well, Ed," Herman says, "you just wake up?"

"This is my regular hour," I states, keeping independent. "What makes you ask?"

"Nothing. I figured maybe Oscar might have woke you up at the same time he got up."

I gives him a glassy stare.

"He did," I answers. "He woke me twice last night about a half-hour apart, once when he went to bed and once when he got up. If you want to put me on night work, Herman, you could first mention it."

"I don't approve such kind of sarcastic remarks," Caroline chips in. "There is few enough in these days who have got energy to make a success for their life, and we better appreciate it when we see it, and not be jealous because somebody cleans up a little work before breakfast."

"My plan is to clean up a little breakfast before work," I returns, "and you don't need to mention about jealous, Caroline, because you have got no foundation."

I was mad all through by this time and Herman could see it plain, but as I could tell what side of the fence Caroline was sliding on I closed up in silence. Oscar no more than sets himself down till he starts the patent line about success, garage efficiency, and hard work; and when he brings out another book to prove it, I gives him a glare that must have gone through him.

"If some could get success by work," says Oscar, "then others can also do the same. There's opportunity for all in the U. S. A. who has a motto of work and win."

I FINISHES the meal on the double, but before I was up from the table Oscar was already on his way down to the garage.

"Now, look here, Ed," Herman speaks up, walking over and facing me. "We don't want you to take this wrong. Caroline and me has been thinking about your interest and when you see a good example like this, why don't you take a pattern after him? This young fellow is a worker and he knows how to study. He has got another book there which he's been reading several pages to me and it's certainly just what you need. You copy after him, Ed, as he is a winner and in this life he is going to work himself up to a very high position."

"If he keeps up this gait," I says, "he is going to work himself into a very low position, and it will be in a wooden box. I will tell you frank, Herman, I don't like Oscar and never did from the first squint I got at him."

I pulls on my hat and goes downstairs in the garage where Oscar is already banging away at the back end of a broken bus. There on a bench in the middle of the floor was one of his work and win garage efficiency books open like it's an invitation for me to read. I walked by as if I don't see it and getting the tools where I left them I started some opposition.

I knows what kind of speed-me-up game Herman is working on me, and I don't like to give in; but at the same time it is not my nature to let any twenty-one-year-old mechanic show me up for speed.

TAKING a tight grip on the hammer, I starts a double time banging that is just a notch faster than Oscar's pace, because if I can't outdo somebody like Oscar, then I figured I better quit.

On the other side of the garage I could see Oscar slamming away at a chisel, and once in a while jerking his head up for a quick look in my direction. As Herman walks up and down the floor between us, the echoes of my hammer doing double time catches his ear. Rolling his eyes over my way he smiles and rubs his hands brisk.

Oscar at the same time has noticed my increased velocity and before a minute is over he has set his pace up equal to mine, also going a little bit past.

"You boys seem to be doing fine," Herman says, walking between us. "This sounds like a live garage the way work is now going on. Have a cigar, Oscar?"

I squints over at Herman and sees he has pulled out one of his marked-down cheroots and is handing it to Oscar.

"You don't need to give it to him," I says, between wallops, "because when is he ever going to get time to smoke it?"

"Maybe on Sunday," Herman replies. "And I am sorry I have only got one so I can't also treat you, Ed."

"As I know the quality you smoke, Herman," I says, "I don't feel cheated. Does this pace we are now going look reasonable to you, or do you still like more pep on the wrench?"

"This is all right, Ed," Herman replies, "you are working O. K. and if you keep

on maybe you might catch up with Oscar."

I threw a mean look in Herman's direction but he missed it. While he turns his back and goes to the end of the garage I stretches a extra point and begins rattling my hammer like a steam riveting machine. Oscar's eyes bulged out toward me as he catches his tongue between his teeth, and the way he swings his hammer is something awful. If this thing is going to be a Nurmi race I figures I certainly am going to stay in the money.

By the end of half a hour I could see Oscar was getting wabbly. Herman has again slipped around and with a smug smile stretched between his ears he stands watching us earn his money. Oscar by this time has tossed his hat into a corner and followed it by his shirt. From the rapid sledge-hammer swings I been keeping up, my own arm was getting shaky; but as I am a tough customer with plenty of experience I keeps a pleasant look on my face like this pace I am hitting is a easy cinch. Oscar was puffing hard and while he was lacking a little in strength he had plenty of determination, but at the same time I figured if a half-hour has already got him winded then a forenoon ought to work him into a absolute wreck. I wondered could I stick it out.

WHILE Herman stands between us looking from one to the other and also taking a occasional slant at the books which Oscar left propped open, the front door swings open and a slick-looking stranger slides in.

I snaps up my head for a quick squint in his direction. As the door was still open I could see a tin Elizabeth was parked on the step so he must have drove up in a car. Oscar eyed him between slams but said nothing. Keeping one eye on the chisel and one on what's going on I see Herman walk up to the stranger to find out what he wants.

They put their heads together and I hear the stranger buzzing in Herman's ear, after which they walks back between where Oscar and me was burning up tools with friction.

"Boys," Herman announces, crooking his left-hand finger at Oscar and motioning to me with the right; "I know you hate to be disturbed at your work but I want you to step out here for a minute as this is something important."

I tossed down the tools like this chance for a rest didn't mean much to me, but at the same time it was a opportunity for getting my breath that I certainly did grab at. Throwing Oscar a sharp look I saw he was about ready to take the count.

"Boys," Herman says, when we had walked out to where he was standing; "this gent who stands here is Mr. Pepper from Chicago. He tells me Oscar telephoned him this morning at the Commercial Hotel in Junction City and asked him to drive out this way. Is this right, Oscar?"

Oscar pulls out a two-feet square handkerchief and mops himself around the neck.

"That's right," Oscar agrees, peeking at me from the end of his eye. "As I saw you had a certain mechanic here who has not got started right in his profession, and as Mr. Pepper is the one who put me on the right track by selling me garage efficiency books, I figured it would be a good favor to you to telephone to Mr. Pepper so that somebody else out here could get some books and also have a chance for success."

HERMAN rubs his hands together and gleams at Oscar.

"This is a bright idea, Oscar," he compliments. "Because when any books can make such a worker out of a mechanic as they have made out of you, then that is what we want in the Skinner Garage."

Oscar's nerve in butting into my private business was enough to take away what breath I still got left. While I stands there dumb Mr. Pepper eyes me up and down like he is glad to see me.

"It is a pleasure," Mr. Pepper states, "to find somebody I can help with efficiency books. Oscar is a young man who only a month ago first saw a set of my books and the good effects on him you could see for yourself."

"What does this set of books cost?" I inquires, at the same time making up my mind I wont buy them.

Herman smacks his hands together.

"Ed," he says, "what is the difference how much they cost, because today the man with book training is the man who he gets ahead, and success in this life is certainly worth the fifty dollars which any set of such books will cost. Now this set of

books is what we need in this garage, and as later you will be one of the family, I have decided to take advantage of such a good chance and pay for these books myself providing you will study them."

"This is a generous offer that no young man with ambition can pass by," Pepper wedges in quick, "and maybe later on he will get such a value from this set of books that he will pay you back the money which they cost."

"That is my proposition, Ed," Herman repeats, eying me close. "Mr. Pepper has got them right out in front in his flivver. Do you say you will study them?"

WITH the three of them standing there facing me I certainly was in a fix. As I was already in bad about becoming Herman's son-in-law I couldn't refuse such an offer from him as it would look like I have got no ambition. I drops my hands down limp. "All right," I agrees.

"It's a bargain," Herman says enthusiastic, while he pulls out his wallet. "Bring in the books."

While I stands there looking agreeable but inside swearing hard, the set of books are dragged in and piled up on a shelf. Herman counts out the fifty. Pepper crams it into his pocket and piles back into his car while Oscar slides out the door after him.

"Where is Oscar going?" I asks Herman.

"Going to buy more books, is what I believe," Herman answers. "He just drew up his pay for the hours he had coming, and I guess maybe he must be going to use the money for more books."

"Looks like he is climbing in the car," I says. Herman opens his eyes and begins to stare.

"He's also got his hat and alarm clock along with him," I adds on.

"Hi there, Oscar," Herman hollers, "where you going?"

"I am going to leave your service," he calls back to Herman, "because I am on my way with Mr. Pepper to spread this valuable gospel elsewhere."

While Herman and me gapes after them the flivver buzzes down the pike. I looks at Herman and Herman looks at me.

"Herman," I says finally, "I will say that of all the slick book-selling schemes I ever heard of, this one which Mr. Pepper and Oscar works is certainly a humdinger!"

Another of Calvin Ball's joyous stories of Ed, the demon garage mechanic, will appear in our next issue.



Demons

A remarkable story of adventure in the interior of Japan—one of the most truly unusual stories any magazine has printed in some time.

By **SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL**

THE white man under the clump of bamboo was dead. What was more to the point, he had obviously taken no enjoyment from the manner of his going. Intelligence in the north-Japan village of Hokano is not low; it covers practical things well enough. Who, however, has more than nineteen yen at once, or can drink nineteen cups of *saké*—and be in condition to know the exact number?—or possess nineteen of anything save fleas? Of what use to count more? Especially so when at twenty, Chinese figures are substituted, which makes the matter a priest's business. And so it was hazarded that the white man must have suffered the death-of-a-thousand-cuts. Sheer waste. Any three or four would have done the work—or even one, perhaps.

Hokano—it is a mountain town, and gets a poor living from shipping the coarse leaves of wild-mulberry—had seen few white men, and never before one in this condition. It frightened them. The place to die was in your quilts, causing trouble for none except the priests.

This white man had been found by chance when an urchin had crawled under the bamboo after a scrawny wayward chicken, and from the boy's own squawk of terror, it was thought that he brought the bird out by one leg. A crowd gathered, through which the three temple priests at last pushed their way.

If there had been latent fear before, it became active now. The priests admitted the seriousness of the affair. Their heads went together on the spot. The ghost of the white man, unappeased, might bring terrible disaster to them all. Counterbalanced with that, was the notion that if the ghost was appeased, with proper rites, it might be done in a manner the white man's god—if he had one—did not approve. Since the priests would perform the ceremonies, the evil would descend principally upon them. They, in truth, did not know what to do, but since the villagers expected something of them, they did what was most natural—looked wise, scowled at nothing at all, muttered under their breaths, and strode importantly about.

The white man, from his appearance, was causing more excitement in his death than he had during his lifetime.

THE decision of the priests was finally announced. The time hurried them. In another hour or so it would be dark, and the hour at which ghosts came up from Yomi (Hades) to vent their spite upon any who had wronged them. There was not time even to attempt preparing against this, and so the ghost must be immediately appeased. After that, the priests would think of some way to satisfy the white man's god. If it was the carpenter-god, a man would be sent to the nearest *seiyo-jin* temple, a good many miles away. Something would be done, but in the meantime, the necessary rites would be gone through with, and the village safe for the night. This would put the trouble on the priests' own shoulders, and they were none too gleeful about the burden.

"This," said the youngest of them, "is what comes from our eating eggs, when the gods have said—"

The oldest looked at him scornfully. "So that is where they disappeared! While I myself went hungry. *Mah!* There is no respect for the gods these days."

Takamura, the young priest, licked his lip, and then choked back his comment, having in mind the penances his elder might allot him.

The old priest turned on the villagers.

"I have something to say to you," he announced slyly. "If this had been a perfect and pure village, and if money had been generously given to the temple, the gods would look at us with favor. The chances are that we would not have had any dead white man to bother us. But even so, I could have performed a great ceremony, and even brought the dead to life again. I should have taken two mirrors and the sword from our secondary shrine, and added to it what we have not,—since little money is given us,—which would be the jewel of birth, the jewel of road-returning, and a serpent-scarf of proven worth, and waved them over the body, saying, 'One, two, three,' and up to ten. Then the white man would arise, since his spirit would be called back—cuts or not!" he roared, seeing some skeptic glance at the mutilated body.

With that he pulled his black rope-girdle tighter, turned, threw a word that all should be at the temple in less than ten

minutes, and puffing out his old chest, shoved through the villagers, his two brethren following in the wake he made.

Ten minutes—it took no more than two to reach the temple. The male villagers went to the inn to talk the matter over; the women gathered in Hokano's one street and rediscussed the business which engrossed their lords. A couple of boys remained to peer under the bamboo, each urging the other to crawl beneath and touch the *seiyo-jin's* gray hand. The urchins did not go very far beneath the clump: you could hardly see the leaves when you were half under the bamboo. The swift night added to even the daylight's lack of sun in that spot, a lack of light brought by the mountain-side, which rose just behind the scene of tragedy. A mountain-side of rocks and brushwood and trees all jumbled together in thick black shadow, a veritable place of demons. Who would venture there even in morning or evening without a protecting clove of garlic tucked carefully into a kimono-sleeve?

There was a fascination about the dead *seiyo-jin*; the boys whispered to themselves, and guessed the sight he must be; they lay on their bellies and peered earnestly between the bamboo-stalks, but wisely went no deeper in.

THE first of the villagers to come to the temple were sent by the old priest Kurohachi to light a little fire near the bamboo-clump, and so purify the place and drive off any lurking demons. The youngest of the priests went with him, crunching brown beads between his palms, and praying as he walked. His muffled voice rose in monotone, and interwoven with the sound came the beat of the little bronze hammer he carried on the bell in his right hand. When the fire was lighted, a handful of salt was sprinkled on it, and the color of the flame became lemon-yellow for moments.

Other villagers were sent for a wooden tub in which to place the *seiyo-jin* in that position where he had first felt the quick of life. In it was placed a bottle of *saké*, unfinished, and some rags tied in prayer-knots. The tub was fastened to two bamboo poles, covered with a straw mat and decorated with branches of pine.

The temple bell throbbed, and the young priest and fire-makers returned hurriedly to the temple; only the tattered urchins remained just outside the circle of the



Photograph © by Underwood and Underwood

JAPANESE priests, such as are described in Mr. Small's absorbing story of an American's strange adventure in the little-known interior of Nippon, at a funeral, with a coffin like that which they thoughtfully provided for the white stranger.

feeble fire, hopeful that later they might squirm, unwanted, into the front ranks with the men and priests, there to see everything, and so have much to boast of. No coward would have remained where they were: *yoh*, but it would be a marvelous thing to tell about! How they had stayed by the *seiyo-jin*, alone, through it all! He would be pulled out from under the bamboo soon, and they decided, in whispers, to have a hand in the venture.

THE temple bell beat faster, and then stopped abruptly, although the air still seemed to move. The boys turned their heads, hearing the expected indefinable hum of a crowd, and the silent slipping of many feet; they saw in seconds the old priest, bareheaded, come along the path, and behind him, all in white, the people of Hokano, bearing the strange banners of the temple and carrying lanterns which jerked with the steps of the bearers. It had darkened swiftly; the lanterns cast lurid lights and made new and strange shadows. The priests chanted steadily as they approached, with a weird minor-cadenced loftiness. The boys, silent and eager, nudged each other, thrilling to the thought of what they would soon see. A dead *seiyo-jin* cut to pieces: well, one would soon find out if their blood was black, as many said. The boys thrilled at the notion.

Then their brown little bodies became taut, and as a cloud of salt suddenly flared yellowly, they gave one frightened sweep of the eyes under the bush, gathered their legs under them, and fled howling with fear toward the funeral procession. They missed the old priest, but bowled over the first carrier of the makeshift tub-coffin, and went down screaming into a thicket of legs.

The first boy, with uncanny sense of touch, found the legs of the old priest and clasped them tightly.

"*Kita zo!*" he screamed, gurgling in his throat. "He has come! He is here now!"

The old priest shook him erect.

"Who has come?" he demanded angrily. "What is this? Because of your interruption, we must have a new ceremony of purification! It is all because you have crossed our consecrated path. I have a good mind to—"

He stopped, seeing how real the boy's fright was, and how the other lad had unerringly found his mother. Then he added

kindly, "What is the matter, baby?" guessing what it probably was.

The other boy had been pushed forward, and the two stood side by side, their wails becoming tears and finally gasps. It was a full minute before either became articulate.

They told the story together, as if taking courage from the support of words:

"We were—by the bamboo. We were waiting. It grew dark—very dark, and we—wished—"

"I said: 'Let us—be brave now. The priests will come—soon—'"

"And we intended—touching the *seiyo-jin*—"

"But we did not dare! And then—"

"We heard—you coming. We saw you. And then—"

"We—"

"We heard—something—"

"In the bushes! And we turned—"

"And saw—"

The old priest stopped them with a laugh.

"Next time," he said soothingly, "you will stay where you belong—and that is not in the company of dead men, babies. Did I not say you were all to come to the temple? That included you both—are you better than the rest?"

HE chuckled, deciding that something in the way of a lesson to all might be deduced.

"That is what comes of not listening to priests," he said sharply. "This is a serious business. You can see that, after what almost happened to those boys. A dead *seiyo-jin*, and his ghost, needs the assistance of priests, I can tell you. I knew well enough that there were devils about, and said a prayer just in time to save those children." The boys shuddered at that, and one buried his face in the priest's black robe. "They heard something, yes. They heard the rush of wind as the demons flew away—"

"*Aita!*" mumbled the boy whose face was hidden. "And we saw the demon as well!"

"We saw two!" asserted the other. "*Two*—and one of them was mounted on a dragon, and his eyes were not like ours, but blue like light in the East—"

"And he had a band of fire about his head," the first said, taking his head from the priest's silk. "A band of fire that—"

"There were two!" insisted his com-

panion. "One was like you have said, and the other—"

"No! One! Only one! And he had teeth that—"

WHILE the boys were talking, it was noticed that the crowd began to stretch itself out, and when the rearmost found the priests were not watching, but had eyes only for the youngsters, he broke into a trot, followed by others; the old priest, assisted by Takamura, sent up a shrill outcry that brought them back trembling.

"Are you to listen to children's tales?" the old priest yelled.

"And have the *seiyo-jin* gods think we are afraid?" Takamura added, violently, since he was just that.

The third priest, silent as ever, left his place and circled about the procession, gathering them into a compact ball. He said nothing, but remained at the rear, well satisfied with his position.

"Now," the old priest said, clutching a boy in each hand, "we will finish this business. And"—to the boys—"I want no more talk of demons."

Order was resumed, and the white-clad villagers, a priest at head, middle and end, advanced in that order, the coffin-carriers ready at a sound to drop their burden and scamper with the rest.

The purifying fire had died away to a few ruddy embers; new bits of wood were placed upon it, and when this blazed up, the old priest dropped incense in the flames. The smoke changed in hue and became violet as the three priests began to chant. Each villager approached the fire, dropping a tiny pinch of the same incense into it.

The moment could be drawn out no longer.

"He is—was—a man such as we," the old priest said as bravely as he could. "Come—you two—and help me—drag him—it—out."

It was noted that the two selected were the most powerful men in Hokano.

"Now!" the priest said, and dropped to his knees at the clump of bamboo. The other two followed mechanically and almost willingly, since the priest had gone first, and if anything happened, it would be to him.

The villagers saw the priest start to crawl, and then heard a strangled exclamation that shook the bamboo's very roots—

heard a louder grunt, and saw the bamboo shake. They were uncertain whether to run or come closer; the commotion under the bamboo might have come from the close sight of the *seiyo-jin* after the advent of the demon, or from—the sight of the demon himself. Was the priest pulling out the body? Or was the awful apparition from the under-heavens pulling in the priest?

Before those nearest and best able to see and hear could manage to bolt through the press behind them, who tried to come closer, the old priest's skinny legs reappeared, and he scrambled out on all fours.

He stood up, blinking in the firelight, and examined the boys. His parchment-skinned face was a sight, crumpled into many lines, crow-footed, extraordinarily thoughtful, and drained of all color.

"What did you say—you had seen?" he asked wanly.

HE had no need to say more. Before the last word was well out of his throat, he and the two boys were left alone. Nor did even he waste much time. He grabbed a boy with each hand, and, his old legs cracking with effort, hurried with them down the dark path, beside which banners had been dropped. Once the three fell over the deserted coffin-palanquin, and the boys screamed that the demon had them.

When he was under the sky-tilted gate of the temple, the priest stopped, and not before.

"What did you see?" he demanded again, in a more natural voice.

Breathless, they told him again of the apparition—one, or two—with the blazing circlet of red, like fire, of the glittering unearthly teeth, of the awful head which seemed to grow out of the ground, of the fearful sky-eyes of blue; to this they added more and more details, feeling at last the importance of their position. They told of a dragon body with scales and spiny tail, and the boy who had insisted that there were two devils, and not one, gave his version of a dog's head on the body of a cat.

"It makes no difference, one or two," the priest muttered. "Demon or demons, what matter? It—or they—were assuredly there, and you must have seen them. I admit it. And—they have taken the *seiyo-jin* with them! He is gone. And now his angered ghost will visit us with more trouble than we ever dreamed of."

He stopped, shivered, and glanced pathetically toward the shrine-room of the little temple. "The *seiyo-jin's* body is in the hands of the gods—or devils," he said shakily. Forgetting the boys, he added aloud: "I—I shall never again doubt the powers of gods—or devils!"

IT now becomes necessary to go back some days before the Miracle of the Vanished *Seiyo-jin*, and a good many miles from Hokano—to the port of Yokohama. Hokano had business enough to occupy it; there never had been such a praying and lighting of incense—and fear!—since an unremembered fox-god had inhabited the body of the richest man in the village, and set out each night on depredations. Hokano can be left safely enough to its new affairs. The temple took in more money that very night than it had in any past year. For once the priests could not complain that the gods were forgotten.

And it is also necessary to lift Andrew Merwin into the piece—Merwin, the trusted, the self-contained little treasurer of the Asiatic Import crowd, whose brain seemed quicksilver, whose inches were few, and whose years were not over twenty-five. He was very lean, had a shock of black hair, a pair of piercing eyes, was brown as a *kurumaya*—in a kimono he could (and did) pass as a Japanese.

Merwin was not generally approved of. Firstly, he was too young; secondly, he was not old enough; thirdly, what can you expect of a man less than fifty? What more condemnation was needed? None, if you asked the pen-pushing cocktail boys. Did Merwin know the Orient? He did not. Had he sweated through twenty hot seasons? He had not. Was he properly promoted, step by step, to his present job? He was not. Well, then! Worse, and more damaging, the little treasurer had a lovely home on the Bluff—proof of his salary—in which lived his wife and two babies; did he ever invite the pen-pushers for "a night" when his family had gone into the hills for a breathing-spell? Did he? No—the tight-wad!

He was stuck-up, too. When a A-I official ran down from Tokyo, or came in on one of the T. K. K. boats, Merwin was willing enough to have him up to eat; he even—greatest of civilian crimes—was known to be very friendly with the Army crowd when they stopped over from Manila, going home, and was not above hang-

ing around with assistant clerks of the consulate, who, as everyone knows, think of nothing but red tape—and books that are of no value to anyone.

Merwin was getting away with his work: that was admitted. But why not? He had a competent office, established before he had come to the Orient, and it functioned despite him. The clerks of Yokohama, nevertheless, waited for something to happen, on the theory that it always does, in the Orient, sooner or later.

When it finally did, they were jubilant, until they heard the facts. Then opinion was divided, since they did not know all of the facts. Merwin never troubled to tell them.

There is a rule that the Asiatic Import has had for many years: No man in authority can make a serious mistake, or have something damaging to the company happen in his department or under his jurisdiction, and—unless he himself rectify it satisfactorily—remain with them. The rule still holds. It made little difference with the Old Man whether or not what actually happened was the man's fault. He should have guarded against it. One accident, one error, the Old Man declared, made a fellow more callous to a second—and the A-I did not propose to be stung twice by the same bee if they could help it.

Merwin's youth made him a target for the Old Man's eyes—that and the fact that the younger man had been the Old Man's secretary in the States, the son of an old friend, and the object of a strong affection. He was the personal product of the Old Man, his own handiwork—his li'l "pet," the drinking crowd said. Merwin would get harsher treatment if anything went wrong than any other. The treasurer realized that, and clearly understood why.

HE needed no such spur to action now. He had plenty without that. As a matter of fact, he thought very little about it. For what had happened was this:

At ten minutes to three Merwin himself had gone to the Specie Bank, and drawn out ten thousand dollars in currency. At seven-forty the next morning a buyer and himself would run up to Miyohima, to bid against the English outfit for silk, and Merwin knew full well the advantage of cash to be produced rather than a check. The bank did not open until ten: the money would be kept in the A-I safe, which was large enough and more than

strong enough—especially since it was wired and protected by a detective agency, and Merwin would leave a guard in the building, who was to report by telephone to the house on the Bluff at stated intervals. This procedure had been necessary before. Merwin thought nothing of it.

The office, as the drinking crowd said—any one of whom, in his own mind, had been eligible to an offer from the A-I before Merwin was sent out to fill the vacant job—ran like clockwork. To Merwin's ingenious mind it sometimes ran too mechanically, and did so now.

For over ten years, on this day, the cashier had started his vacation at three o'clock, after mailing-time and after the bank had closed. Thus he was able to catch the three-fifty train into the hills, and go to the same hot springs he had gone for every one of the ten-odd years. He did not do differently now. At one minute to three he turned his coop over to his assistant, took five long steps, slammed the time-locked safe shut as if to say, "Can't trust it open when I'm away," just as he had done each of the other years. At three he was going out of the door, and a clerk or two set his watch by him. And at half-past three Merwin came back, the ten thousand in an inner pocket.

MERWIN was perfectly cool. He telephoned the station, described the appearance of the cashier, and asked that when the man arrived, he be requested to return to the office. The agent was very polite: he assured Merwin that everything would be done, that all of the guards would be informed personally, that he himself would see to it—and hanging up his receiver, decided that it was none of his business, and that if the white men wanted a thing done, they could do it themselves.

Merwin very naturally took the money home with him, and said nothing to anyone in the office about it.

He was, he decided, perfectly safe. The bank-teller knew that he had ten thousand dollars. The office knew that he had gone for it at some time, since he had had the cashier draw the check at eleven that morning. For all they knew, the money was in the safe, and the time-lock shifted ahead so that he could get it out in the morning before taking the train. He even played the fool, and gave orders that one man was to stay at the office until midnight, and another from then to morning,

and that each might have the next day off. The office hummed on calmly, and at six Merwin went home well satisfied. He could not see where he had allowed anything to creep in, anything save coincidence. He thought it over several times on the way home, and could find no error in his reasoning.

The Old Man had told him to trust no one where money was concerned, and he thought, on his way home, that he had been needlessly cautious—with the exception of the porters, the warehousemen, the door-boy and telephone-boy, all of the men were white and had been with the A-I for years.

As he swung up the shortcut from macadamized road to macadamized road, always winding upward between stone walls, trees, and glimpses of garden, he began to grin boyishly, and the set office-look disappeared; Merwin became a youngster again, pleased at his solution to the trifling difficulty, happy at nearing home and being able to throw off the years he tried so hard to assume in business. Getting away, tomorrow, would be pleasant; he was not unaware that many of the whites believed him up-stage, where he only tried to follow the big boss' orders; after the business was concluded, he might find some cool tea-house and loaf a bit. He might even run across the cerise kimono that Wilma wanted to send home. He wished the babies were a bit bigger, so Wilma might leave them with the *ama*, and go with him.

He swung at last through his own gate and up the shrub-lined path, whistling loudly. He shouted as he came through the door: "How were the kids today? Anybody been in to see you? Something smells darned good—gosh, but I'm some hungry!"

Even on the veranda, after dinner, he said nothing of what he had still in his pocket. Why should he? Wilma'd worry, perhaps, about a thing not worth worrying about. He did, however, push the packet of currency under the mattress, and shove his automatic beneath his pillow when she was not watching. At ten they were in bed, the Bluff as silent as a snowbound Dakota ranch.

IT was Wilma Merwin who woke first.

She said softly, "I think I hear the babies. The *ama* sleeps like a rock!" and slid out noiselessly.

Merwin lifted himself sleepily to one elbow, and then, with a short sound akin to a sob, fell back on the pillow. He had been dextrously smashed over the head—not so deftly, however, that he had not time for one glimpse of his wife seized by fierce, encompassing arms.

He came to on the floor, and not in his original position. Even the wild throbbing of his head did not stop him from an all-embracing vision of the room. The bed was ripped apart. Upset chairs seemed to thrust up their legs as if in defense. His wife was gagged and bound about the arms, legs, and thighs. The *ama* was huddled in a corner, and lifted a pallid face, down which a trickle of blood had already flowed. In her right arm she clutched the smallest of the babies, which, like herself, had been gagged; the other child was in an incongruous heap, and Merwin's heart leaped when he saw it move spasmodically.

He tried to jump to his feet, and not until then did he discover that he also had been tied, and gagged as well. If he had been a boy during the evening, and a boy playing a man's part at the office, he was all man now. The condition of his head almost precluded thinking. He drew his knees toward his body, and jerked them out, achieved a foot advance; then he rolled over and over, bumping the bed, a chair—hitched himself about and rolled through the door, half-oblivious to the whimpers coming through the gags. Down the hall he rolled as swiftly as he could, his head becoming a burning pain, and into the children's room. His heart jerked painfully as he saw that his half-formed plan was impossible. He had intended burning off the bonds with the night-light the *ama* always left on the floor beside her quilts, but found that, this night, she had set it on a chair. He had often told her not to leave it beside her quilts.

IN sudden anger he kicked with both feet against the chair, overturned it so that the bowl with its little burning taper slid to the floor—and burned still. He made a hoarse sound through the gag, rolled beside it, jerked, twisted, and got his hands—bound neatly behind his back—over the tiny flame. He wondered that it did not feel very hot, although he could feel the tickle of flame, and smell flesh and hair. He tried to hurry the burning of the cloth bonds, and with instinctive desire, thrust

his hands closer to the flame—rolled away in fright, turned on his back, and saw that he had put the light out.

Merwin became wild: he pulled his arms viciously apart, and the partially burned shackles ripped, tore—and left him free.

He reached for the *ama's* work-basket, grabbed scissors, and freed his legs, and then yanked the gag away as he rushed to his own bedroom.

He roared at them all alike: "What have they done to you?" and jumped in panic from his wife to a child and back again, impotent, crazed with fear.

In some way he removed his wife's gag, her bonds; together they picked up the children. The younger, save where savage hands had scratched its tender skin in fastening the gag, was unhurt; the other's arm hung limp, and it cried with pain. The *ama* had a cut on her forehead, and called down curses that started with Kaminari, god of thunder and ended with the dreaded Kishibojin, mother of demons, the moment her mouth was able.

WILMA MERWIN said shakily: "I'm all right, Andy. They were terribly rough. That was all. The people here have always said that the Orient makes beasts of some men—" She stopped, and rocked the injured child gently.

"We'll need a doctor, Andy," she concluded.

"More than a doctor," he said tonelessly. He had actually forgotten, until that instant, of what had been concealed in the bed. He walked slowly to it, but needed to make no examination—the money was gone. Yesterday that would have seemed terribly important; now it faded into a minor thing, and not to be considered along with what had been done to his wife and youngsters.

"I'll telephone Dr. Martin," he said in the same level voice. "And then—"

And then—what? He did not know. Obviously, the police. The money was gone; it was their place to bring it back. Also, it was his place to assist them however he might.

He stood dumbly a moment, eying his wife and the hurt boy. He could see carmine marks and puffed flesh where she had been tied, and could imagine too easily the brutality of her treatment. The *ama*, he guessed correctly, had heard what scuffle there had been, had grabbed up the sleeping infant and come to see what the trouble

was; how the older boy had followed her, being wakeful, he was told later. The result he knew without any telling.

"They did a good job," he said.

His wife nodded.

"They tied me—like experts. Big men, both. Or they may have been more. Two, anyhow. They seemed to be sailors. They might have been. I don't know."

Merwin started for the telephone in the living-room.

He said: "White men, of course? You'd know them if you saw them again?"

"No." She trembled slightly. "Oh, no. One had gold teeth."

Merwin grunted. He said, "Thanks," and went to the phone.

"Got Martin right off," he said, when he was back. "He was home, for a wonder. He's coming for Jack. Said he'd do whatever was necessary in the hospital. You and the baby'll stay with Ann Martin tonight—tomorrow, too, maybe. Take the *ama* with you. Make you feel easier, away from here."

"And you, Andy?"

He looked blankly about the room, and then to her bruised arms.

"Martin'll be here in a minute," he said. "You better get dressed, so's to be ready. Me? I've got some business to attend to." He smiled mirthlessly, cleared his throat, and then said, clipping his words curiously: "I'm goin' lookin' for—gold teeth."

DR. MARTIN came as quickly as he had promised. In some way Merwin answered his hastily flung questions. The Doctor insisted that the police be informed immediately, and Merwin agreed to do it. The child with the broken arm—broken by a violent twist, the Doctor said—whimpered with pain and fright, and the reiterated sound ground through the father horribly. At last, somehow, they were suddenly all gone, and he was left alone. He hardly remembered their going: Wilma's "Be careful, old Andy!" he did not hear at all.

He had neglected saying anything to Martin about his crack on the head. It ached steadily. Mechanically, he shuffled into the bedroom and righted a chair, searching in the bureau for cigarettes before he remembered that they were in the drawer of the living-room table. He found a full packet there, tore off the top, and lit one. Then he sat heavily in one of the chairs.

It seemed increasingly strange to him that the disappearance, the stealing, of the A-I's money was unimportant, but that what had happened to Wilma, to his boys, was not to be borne.

His existence had been ordered; it had been simple to come to the Orient, protected by a great organization, and assume a rôle of dignity—a rôle the Old Man had insisted he must play, to add importance to his scant years. The Old Man would accept no excuse for the loss—it meant his job. He might get the money back, of course, in which case no action might be taken—but he did not care especially about that. Cared for it only because it would bring him in contact with the thieves. Anger surged up into his throat, and he felt, for the first time in his life, the bristling of his flesh. As he thought of the handling his wife and children had received, his heart beat so he could almost hear it; a rat hidden somewhere in the basement bore it company by scratching diligently at the brickwork.

SLOWLY, wasting what he realized dimly were precious and unregainable minutes, Merwin forced himself to consider every possibility.

The whole thing, he decided with reason, was chance. None knew that he had taken the money home with him. Had he mentioned anything at all to the bank teller? He knew that he had not, since he himself had no idea in the bank that the currency would go any place save in the office safe. The cashier? Never. The man had been with A-I for long and trusted years, and had plenty of opportunity to make away with larger sums. Who else? There wasn't anyone. It was coincidence—accident—chance. And there was no good, no reason, to say anything about it at the office. Except to go down, give the watching clerk there a check payable to the silk people at Miyohima and tell him to meet the buyer at the seven-forty and give it to him, explaining that he, Merwin, had other business.

If Wilma had guessed correctly, and the thieves had been white sailors, where would they go? Not back to their ships until morning; it was, a glance at his watch told him, nearing midnight, and the waterfront police made it impossible for any smallboat to leave after ten. Inland? Why? Merwin doubted that. Everything pointed to some dive for the night, and

escape in the morning, shipping casually on a large boat where they would be unnoticed.

He stood up. One by one, he could go through the saloons, the Japanese drinking-shops, the lowest inns, and better alone than with the police. It came to him that each time the police were told anything, they made an uproar and accomplished little.

What he wanted was a big man—a big white man—with gold teeth. His companion, the other thief, he had no clue of, but he believed—if the money had not been divided—that the two would stick very closely together. A white man with false gold teeth—as well search a rice field for kernels of yellow instead of gray, Merwin thought bitterly.

IF he could find the man,—the men,—he could then get help; he knew too well his small stature. Suppose they recognized him? That was not probable, but possible, of course. Through his head ran the fact that the thieves would be more alert against a white man, a well-dressed white man, in one of the drinking-shops, where few ever came, than against a bum, in bum's clothes. He had no bum's clothes; nor, at this hour, could he get them from a secondhand store.

Then, for the first time, his lips lose their straight line, and he grinned slightly. He lost not a moment, but ran into the bedroom, and pulled from a hook in the closet the kimono he wore in hot weather at home—a regular navy-blue runner's jacket. He tossed it on the bed, and then went into the *ama's* room, and took from her cupboard a pair of short white socks, pulled off his shoes and stockings and drew on the white socks, thrusting his feet into a pair of the *ama's* straw sandals. They were the second size, and fit as well as the silk-strapped ones he wore himself at night.

Likewise, he shed the trousers he had pulled on before the Doctor's coming and then went into his own room and slipped swiftly into the kimono. Before the mirror he plastered his black hair tightly, wincing as the brush touched his forehead. There, becoming plain, was an ugly bruise; he must have been struck twice, he decided. For an instant the possible tell-tale mark disconcerted him. Then, with a short, "Why not?" he was in the dining room, jerked open a drawer of linen, found a dark blue toweling-cloth used for suppers

and lunches, and ripped off a strip six inches wide and a yard long. This he folded into a band, and bound it as a fillet about his forehead in true coolie style. It covered the bruise perfectly. More, it gave him an additional touch that obliterated almost every trace of the Eurasian that the costume had suggested before. All but the eyes. Well, he must keep them half-closed, if he could.

The thieves would, if they had any sense, avoid displaying their money, since it was all in large bills; they would, however, be certain to have had a drink or two, if for no other reason than to justify their being in a dive. The Japanese might know him for what he was, but they would say nothing. He must chance his masquerade with the thieves—if he found them.

He looked about for a purse, but found none, and contented himself by slipping one five-yen bill in his kimono-sleeve, and the rest of his money in his sock. He could not find the automatic.

THE streets, winding down from the Bluff, were ink-black. To make better time, he picked up his sandals and ran barefoot on the smooth macadam, only replacing them when he was off the hill.

Once he almost ran into several Japanese returning on foot from a tea-house; it was under a light, and the "*Doko ye ikunda!*" ("Look where you are going!") they flung at him pleased him immensely. He would pass a casual inspection, evidently.

At first, instinctively, he took back streets, but seeing how deserted they were, and realizing that he must sooner or later be put to the test of his masque, he set out for the principal roads, headed always toward the water. Two streets after Honmura-machi he turned obliquely to the left, headed for a dim light.

He reached it, and the descending steps it indicated—walked past, stopped, paused, and came slowly back. It seemed very quiet below; no lookout promised forbidden delights. He walked slowly down the rickety stairs, pushed open the swinging door, and found none there save the owner, a swarthy half-caste.

"Well?" the owner said. He made no move toward his bottles.

"*Sugu ni koi to no kotodzuke,*" Merwin said haltingly. "I have been sent with a message that a white man was to come. A sailor-man, with teeth of gold. I was not told his name."

The Eurasian grinned wickedly.

"Is it a bet?" he asked in English. "Get out of here! I hope you lose, *seiyo-jin*! Better pose as an artist, fella. No coolie ever had hands like that. G'wan—get out. I don't know you. Git!"

Merwin got.

In the black street he blamed himself. Why had he blurted out his business like that? Suppose the thieves *had* been there, in some inner room? Should he go back? Inform the police? As he walked away he decided that, had the Eurasian something to conceal, he would have been jovial, placating, and not brusque. Ten steps on, he was not so sure.

It was a fool's errand.

He was unequipped, unprepared; he did not know what to do, nor how to do it. It was police business.

At that instant he knew what drove him on: he wanted those thieves himself, knowing what they had done. They had taken more from him than money, more than a position. He wanted to come back to his wife and say, "I got them!" and relate an heroic tale. . . . No, to get them would be satisfaction enough, although the other would be very wonderful.

He found nothing. Almost all of the saloons were shut and padlocked; here and there he found an open *gyu-ya* reeking with frying fish, with a *kurumaya* half asleep over his eat-and-drink—nothing else.

There was one more chance: the Yoshiwara. After that, he might as well go home, telephone the police, and go to bed.

HE started for the heart of the city, and for the first time began to meet others; a party in 'rickshas, hilarious and calling to one another; two European-dressed Japanese clerks walking soddenly toward their homes. He passed rapidly through the geisha-district, already nearly dark, and with only a few *samisen* tinkling, the sound held in check by giggles in many keys. Behind the great *mikeaeri yanagi*—the look-back willow—he saw the wide street, shrub-lined, and the many lights still burning like white checker-marks, one here, one there. He could even see the first dark door over which striped curtains dangled.

The street was not deserted. Men and ancient crones were at every door plying their by-product to the trade. A few late-comers hurried past Merwin; others slowly shuffled out and into the dim streets, or

bawled loudly for conveyance. Near the entrance stood one lone white-clad policeman, and as Merwin approached, the little officer beckoned to a pair of European-dressed roysterers.

They did not heed him, but continued down the street, out of the Yoshiwara. As Merwin neared the official, the latter called to the white man: "I want the time!"

MERWIN reached for his vest-pocket before he thought, an incongruous gesture; the policeman grinned and peered into the other's face.

"*Danna-san!*" he announced.

Merwin returned the grin feebly.

"What time is it?" the officer asked.

"My watch is home," Merwin said. "I am sorry."

"It is time for me to be relieved," he was told. "My own watch is always fast—or slow! It is hard not to know the time exactly! I asked a number of men, but each watch is different! And then two *seiyo-jin* came a moment ago. I asked them—or rather, I called to them—but they did not reply, or come near me! *Mah!* That angered me, for they must have been wealthy men. One of them had teeth of gold. Their watches would—gods in heaven, what have we here?"

Merwin was gone, down the same street the two white men had taken, leaving the policeman to mutter that the ways of the foreigners grew stranger every day.

The pair passed under an intersection-light; Merwin had them in sight. He hurried his pace, keeping to the side of the street and out of vision. What he wanted now was a policeman again. He dared not go back for the other one; to tackle the two as he was, unarmed, would be valiant, but perfectly hopeless. The two kept to side-streets. Merwin again saw no one.

This did not trouble him: he would find where the two had gone, and then go for help—and, he thought gleefully, take an active part in the capture. He wanted ~~one~~ the man with the gold teeth by preference.

That the pair did not attempt closing in toward the waterfront surprised him, until he realized finally that they were steadily nearing the railroad station. They were obviously no fools, and knew exactly what they were doing. From their walk Merwin believed his wife had been correct, and that the men were sailors.

One train was standing in the sheds.

Merwin cast about wildly for an officer, and saw none. The pair went to the wicket; money passed; they boarded a first-class carriage. Merwin ran to the ticket-window himself, blurting:

"Those men—the two white men—thieves. Telephone for the police!"

THE fat clerk did not move an eyelid, and Merwin translated it into Japanese as rapidly as he could.

"It is not in the regulations for ticket-sellers to inform police unless the station or a passenger is robbed," the clerk said calmly. "I have sold you no ticket. Are you a passenger? No!"

"But—"

"That ends it."

"Sell me a ticket, then!"

"Where to? And, little man, I am not desirous of half-breeds addressing me as you do. You have your father's eyes—and I do not like them."

"To the same place the white men bought their tickets."

"Information not given unless by order," the fat clerk said placidly.

"Where does the train go?"

"Information-clerk not here except in daytime. Time-table outside gives data, little man."

The clerk grinned, and offered a bit of information of his own: "And train goes in two minutes by the clock."

This shut off Merwin's other intention, to make use of the public phone. He could, however, wire ahead to Tokyo, or to any large junction point, at the train's first stop.

"Give me a ticket to—how far does this train go?" Merwin remembered that tickets must be bought in advance, and that his attire gave him no white-man advantages.

"Have you that much money?"

The train's engine coughed.

Merwin stooped, and grabbed the bills from his sock. He pulled one of fifty yen from its fellows, and shoved it across the counter. "Give me a ticket—any ticket—that fifty yen will buy!" he yelled.

"First class, second class, or—"

A blind man could see that the clerk was deviling Merwin. The latter swallowed his anger. "Any one you wish," he said, trying to make his voice servile.

"That is better," the clerk said. "Here"—stamping—"is a ticket. I think you are drunk."

Merwin grabbed it, and ran for the train.

The ticket was third class; he lost thirty seconds at a first-class carriage, and barely got in the correct one after being refused entry into the other. His entrance—on his face, since the guard pushed him in—was greeted with shouts of laughter.

He found a corner, and sat stolidly on the bench.

When the ticket-collector came through, Merwin asked quietly:

"What is the first stop?"

The guard told him—a village Merwin had never heard of.

The white man drew his five-yen note from his sleeve and gave it to the train man.

"I want to telegraph," he said. "What stop can I do it at?"

The Japanese tucked the bill into a uniform pocket.

"All closed," he said. "Not until morning." He waxed pleasant because of the large tip. "Can I help you?"

"Would you tell me where the two white men are going?"

The guard grinned. "Assuredly. North. I think they go to Noshiro to their boat. I asked them what a white man wanted in Odate—their tickets were for there—and they said they would go on to Noshiro, to a boat. They may have lied—who knows? They leave the train at Odate, the last stop. And," he added, smiling, "I think you will get off with them."

Merwin said, before he thought: "Don't tell them!"

"I could," the train man said. "They speak some Japanese, although when they swear, they do it in another tongue. Tell them what might be to their advantage? *Yoh!* It was not pleasant to have one of them refer to my mother as a she-dog—I know that much English! For no other reason than my requesting that they refrain from spitting—"

STRETCHED out at full length on the wooden bench of the car, Merwin slept fitfully through what remained of the night. He breakfasted from a little wooden box at nine, bought at the first station at which he heard the cry, "*O-Bento!*" on hot rice, brown beans flavored with a shaving of red ginger, black mushrooms, pickled fish and hot milk. The friendly guard, who went through with the train in Oriental fashion, brought him bulletins from the first-class

car. Sometimes nothing more than a statement that the white men had bought more cigarettes, or were dividing a bottle of beer between them. One bit of news was more important to Merwin: the pair had a deck of cards, and the guard said that, although no money was visible, they played with deadly earnestness. "They go about together," the guard confided. "If one steps to the platform at a station, the other is always with him."

In Odate, Merwin's gray eyes, unslanted, were not instantly marked; Odate had never been burdened with half-castes, and he was apparently accepted as a Japanese. White men, from the courtesy with which the swaggering pair were treated, were few in and about Odate. The pair seemed well pleased when they alighted from the train and found none waiting for them; one nudged his mate after he had peered quickly about. Both laughed. They considered they were safe, and, once embarked from Noshiro in some ill-registered tramp, they would be.

Merwin watched them into an inn, a low, rambling structure with an inclosed garden, heard them roar in vile Japanese, for a large room and serving-girls, and then hurried off for aid.

HE asked twice, and was at last able to find a shopkeeper who was able to direct him to the jail. He found it, and found it empty of all save rats. He called into the nearest house, and was told that the mayor lived on the next street, in the house with a wooden balcony—found that, and the official.

He did not make the same error that he had with the railway clerk, but bowed gravely, hoped the mayor was in good health, his family likewise, and then stated his business.

"I have come from Yokohama after two villainous thieves," he said. "Two brutal white men, who injured my child and wife, and stole my money. They are at the inn. Will you please allow me to have several armed policemen, and we will capture them?"

The mayor scratched his head.

"How much did they take?" he asked.

"Twenty thousand yen."

"*Hoi!*" The mayor thought it over.

"You have letters from your employer?" he asked at length.

Merwin admitted that he had not. He went into explanation.

"You may be a white man," the mayor admitted. "You look a very little like one. But often I have seen Japanese who are as light as your upper arms,"—which Merwin had shown him,—"and I must admit that your story is very strange. I—it must be thought over! Arresting white men is no simple matter, I assure you! I have never arrested one before, to say nothing of two! It must be thought over."

Merwin said seriously: "Certainly, honorable mayor. But we must not let these thieves get away."

"That is another matter," the official agreed.

He rubbed his chin, and then his face brightened. "I have it," he said. "The telegraph is closed, but in my official capacity I will have it opened, and we will send messages to Yokohama, asking who you are, and verifying your business here. Shall we address them to the police, or—where?"

Merwin's face became blank.

Then he said: "Telegraph my wife. She will—"

"Doubtless your wife is an exceedingly honorable lady, but we must have another's word here. Whose?"

Merwin said helplessly: "It all happened last night. I have told no one of it, save you just now. Don't you believe me?"

"Every word," the official assured him. "But—a man placed as I am, must have more. Well?"

"Are there any other white men here?"

"A foreign priest, yes. A big and fat *danna-san*. You wish to see him?"

THE mayor saw unpleasant business taken from his shoulders, and gave Merwin no rest. "Come—I will show you the way. It is only a few steps."

The missionary had been in bed, and came into the mission's main room with tousled head and angry mien.

When he found that neither a christening, a marriage nor a funeral awaited him, he grew no more amiable. He listened to Merwin's story, and then said grimly:

"A cock-and-bull story, Merwin—if that's your name. I think the three of you're crooks. My advice to you, Okyo,"—to the mayor,— "is to send them all packing. White men here'll do nothing except make trouble. Kick 'em out."

Okyo said, smiling: "Are they—followers of your god, honorable priest?"

"I suppose so. Why?"

"Nothing. Nothing. My wife has mentioned you, and your works. I believe I shall remain as I am, however." He smiled charmingly.

Merwin, despite his dilemma, chuckled.

The missionary became very dignified, since he had been touched. He started to explain to Okyo that there were good white men and bad white men, that obviously this masquerader wanted nothing more than the money the other two had probably stolen themselves, that—

"There are good dogs and bad dogs," the mayor agreed. "I will stay as I am." He became serious again. "I do not see what I can do," he said. "White men do not come here dressed in coolie-clothes—especially one who would have twenty thousand yen to be stolen."

"Let me wire. I will have my appearance telegraphed to you, by some Yokohama authority. Or you can wire them for it, and—"

"At times men are like peas in a pod," Okyo told him. "No. I will have nothing to do with the business."

"And perfectly right!" the missionary agreed.

Merwin looked at him quietly.

"You don't understand," he said simply. "It's more than money, Mr.—Mr.—" The missionary did not offer his name. "You see, they abused, cruelly, my babies and my wife. They—"

"That is the way with white women in the Orient," the missionary snapped. "Always encouraging men—"

Merwin turned very cold.

"MY boys have complained—rather, they have said that you are all very unfriendly. I did not believe it. I believe it now. I do not believe, however, that your Master will blame me when I tell you to go to hell, sir."

He left with that, Okyo pattering behind him.

"All priests are alike," Okyo said, coming up to him. "I do not like the breed!"

"The pattern was lost after this one was made," Merwin said in English, hot spots of color still stinging his cheeks. "You do not understand what he said."

"Men give others the motives they have themselves," Okyo suggested. "Come—I have relented to a certain degree. We will send your wire asking for identification. An answer will come in the morning—or

by noon. Sometimes it is faster to send the telegram on the train—"

"In the morning they will be gone," Merwin muttered.

"You are very difficult to please. Sleep well tonight. The inn is a good one. I can recommend the boiled chicken. And now I will go to bed myself. Good night."

ACCUSTOMED to more clothes, to an overcoat after dark, Merwin was cold before he reached the inn. There were not over a half-dozen rooms, all about the little garden, and all opening into it; no need to make talk by asking for one close to the white men's. Merwin's quilts were arranged on the floor, and he slipped on the inn's night kimono, crawled into bed, indicating to the serving-maid that the *hibachi* of smoldering charcoal be placed beside him, and then, after she had sprinkled an oblong of insect powder around the bed and had left, he lit his first cigarette.

He heard her retreating steps, and then listened intently. Nor had he long to wait; from across the garden came the tones of a harsh voice, in English. An answer, as unpleasant. Merwin raised himself on his elbow.

There was a light in the sailors' room, but the room itself was so angled that Merwin could see nothing except the rays in the court's rock pool. He lay quietly, listening to the *shuff-shuff* of cards, to the little *spat* as they were slapped to the matting, and then to a chuckle and—in a different voice—a grunt of disgust.

He grew warm under his many quilts. The shuffle of the cards never ceased, and he could almost hear the bated breath of the intent men who played. And then—he may have dozed for moments—he became very alert.

Words reached him clearly.

"That's that," he heard. "Hand over, Sammy. I won it all—clean. You been a-carryin' of it—now hand over."

No answer. "Well, Sammy?"

A new voice, lowered to a whine: "I got to have somethin' of it, Kid. That's fair. Wasn't it my idear, all of it? Where'd we be if I hadn't heard that Jap kid in th' eatin'-shop a-tellin' how his boss was iddled-de-diddled, an' him so proper always, an' then havin' the safe shut on him? Where'd we be, huh? Was it you as heard the Jap? Was it you who said to him: 'I usta work for yer boss in the

States—does he still live on the Bluff?' an' did the telephone-pluggin' fool tell you or me? Huh? *You* never heard him boast of nothing! Be nice, Kid. Call it a pleasant li'l game, an' I'll split, even-steven. What say?"

"I says done is done, Sam. If you'd of won, where'd I been?"

"I'd of divided with you, Kid, old pal. You know that. I'd of said—"

"Yeh! Divided—like hell! Come across, Sammy. Or—"

"Or what?"

"I hate to take it, Sammy!"

"Yeh! Try to, you mean! An' have the Japaneedles jug us both. An' then where are we?" His voice raised. "We'd be in the same fix we'd of been in if you'd done what you wanted to with that woman on the Bluff." Sadly: "You're a fool, Kid. You need me, an' I need you. Fifty-fifty."

"Hand over, Sammy!"

"Couldn't think of it, Kid. Not until we get to Noshiro, anyway. Le's get to sleep!"

"An' have you finish me?"

"Why, Kid—"

"I know you. Well—all ri'—push that fire-box over to me, Sammy. . . ."

A little sound, and a soft thud. That, Merwin guessed, would be the fire-box moved. He knew now where the news had trickled out, and how. But that helped him little. The problem was—

He came erect, and slid out of his quilts and into his kimono. He had heard this:

"The rat's hidden it somewheres. I thought it was in his pocket!" And needed to know no more. Before he was in the garden, he heard repeated strange sounds—a swishing, and then a dull shock of sound. As he ran, he shouted:

"*Koruso! Koruso! Murder!*"—and heard the inn come to life.

He had no time to look for a rock or stick to serve as weapon. The horror ringing in his ears, he smashed through the paper panel and into the sailors' room, to take, at the moment of entry, a fist against his jaw and a knife in his shoulder.

WHEN Merwin gradually saw the light of the room do something more than come out of blackness and whirl about before him, the room was filled with people. His first thought was anger for himself: twice he had gone down, and in the same way.

Then he heard the man called "Kid:"

"I was dead asleep—dead to the world. I hears Sammy here make a kind a noise, gruntin'-like, an' I wakes up. I finds—what? This feller—this Jap, or this 'breed—bendin' over him, a bloody knife in his hand. An' I gets to my feet quiet, an' I gives him what-for—and there he is! Is it gettin' so a decent man can't get a night's sleep without murder bein' done?"

And the missionary: "I told you he was a bad one, Okyo-san! I knew it. I am a judge of men. Dear, dear, the man will die without a word of comfort from me!"

Merwin saw Okyo bend over Sam.

"He is not dead yet, but he will die," Okyo said. "*Mah!* And I was dreaming so pleasantly. . . . It is all very sad. I rather liked the little man in coolie costume."

"I knew him for what he was," the missionary snapped.

"Thanks," Merwin said weakly; he could think of nothing else.

It was all so foolish. He would be properly identified. Even if the fools believed that he had killed the man called Sam, proof of who the fellow was, and what Merwin's errand had been, would right that. In the meantime, Sam was out of it, and his companion could not leave Odate until the business was cleared up; and he, Merwin, would have the office send some one from police headquarters to Odate who knew him.

HIS part in the capture had been little, and that unheroic, but the men were here. The business was over. Merwin eyed "the Kid" soberly. Slowly, new anger at what the fellow's partner had said before began to fill Merwin to bursting point.

"You skunk!" he said. "You unutterable skunk!"

The man did not recognize him.

"I'm Merwin," he added. "The man you robbed, whose—"

"Sure. I know ya," the Kid agreed, his face moving no muscle. "It was in the Kobe jail I seen ya, wasn't it? I was a-goin' through with the Salvation Army, a-givin' tracts to—"

"I knew he was a criminal," the missionary snapped. "He has a nasty face."

"Thanks again," Merwin said.

He saw no reason for further attempts at explanation.

"You'll find out soon enough who I am, and why I came."

"We don't need to," the missionary

snarled. "We know! And I say this—the sooner you suffer for this crime, the better." He wagged his head. "What effect will this have on my little flock? White men killing one another! We will make an example of you, Mr. Murderer."

Okyo watched the man who bound Sam's deadly wounds.

"Let us go into another room," he said. "The sight of blood is not good for the appetite."

MERWIN in the middle, they crossed the court again, and went to the main guestroom of the inn, one six mats wide.

"Now, let us consider this sanely," Okyo said.

"There is nothing to consider," the missionary shouted. "Let us do swift justice to this man."

"First, will you please do as I have asked—wire Yokohama?"

"And have lawyers and lawyers and crooks and crooks here, when we already know what happened."

Okyo said sorrowfully: "Lawyers will turn me inside out. Are you sure you did not kill this man, Merwin-san?"

Merwin shook his head.

"It would make it easier for all of us if you had, and admitted it. Although of course *you* might not find the results pleasant, and everyone must be considered. *Yoh!* I do not know what to do!"

"Wait until the knifed man can speak," Merwin suggested. "Then he will tell you—"

"My poor pal'll never speak again," the Kid sniffed.

"An excellent idea," Okyo agreed. "I shall myself go and tell his attendant to let us know the moment the man can open his mouth—" He blinked. "Or did we leave him alone? I shall see. Come, you,"—to a maid-servant,—"you will stay by him, if none have remained."

He was back in an instant.

"Gone!" he whispered. "I saw blood on the mats, but nothing else! He must be out of his head!"

"My poor mate," the Kid shouted, and brushing through the Japanese, was out of the room, calling, "Come an' look for him!"—in English, which only the two white men understood.

"We will all search for the unfortunate man," the missionary decreed. "All except you, Merwin. *You* stay here, guarded. I will remain to see that you do not escape.

The rest of you go with Okyo. Poor man! such love for his injured friend!"

"They're both gone," Merwin muttered, when he, the missionary Peters, and several Japanese were left in the room. "Sam went go far, in his condition. He went go any farther after the Kid finds him."

"Naturally. Then he will be brought tenderly home."

"You're an ass," Merwin said under his breath.

He said later: "Is it within your saintly province to have my shoulder bound? It's dripping."

"Yes. We wont cheat the gallows. You'll be the better for it; my doctoring-book says bleeding is good for the spleen."

One by one the searchers returned. In the night Merwin realized that they must almost fall over the crawling Sam to find him, and that the Kid could play hide-and-seek with them. They announced that they had not found the wounded *seiyojin*.

As the Kid did not return, Peters said, well pleased: "There is a lesson in this. He is not easily discouraged. Such do the white men for their friends."

Okyo said nothing, but it was noticed that he offered Merwin one of his own cigarettes, and patted him on the sound shoulder.

When the huge gold-toothed white man had not returned by noon of the next day, Okyo decided that he would be worth the finding, and went into action accordingly. Peters believed a grave injustice was being done.

SANDORO, near village to Hokano, had a temple of its own, and when the first runner from Hokano announced the presence of demons, the Sandoro priests considered the seriousness of the affair. Fires were lighted in a dozen places. The one shop which had garlic in stock did a profitable business. Villagers clipped their hair in shapes which devils could not abide, stars, oblongs and rhomboids, which stood out black against a bare white scalp.

It was a dull day, with a dazed sun—a good day for devil's work. The runner had arrived the morning following the advent of the demon at Hokano, and two mornings distant from the disappearance of the Kid.

The demon, the runner reported, would be readily recognized. The story had enlarged to this: the demon had the body of

a dog, the tail of a dragon, and the wings of a stork. The top of his head was missing, and the red blood inside welled over—if it was blood demons had. His teeth shone brighter than dragons' fangs, and were composed of infants' bones made phosphorescent with gold powders. His head might have been a man's or woman's; opinions differed as to that. The old priest of Hokano was coming later, and that learned man would give the delectable details of the adventure. The priest had started with the runner, but walked more slowly. The villagers of Sandoro knew that when the priest came to pray at the *shintai* of Jizo, the demon would return to Yomi speedily.

AND the village had news to tell the runner, although not nearly as exciting an event. A white man had come late the previous night, a *seiyo-jin* very tired, who, from his appearance, had lost his way from Odate—where else would one come from?—and whose jacket had been torn by thorny shrubs, whose shirt had been ripped, showing the scratched hairy body beneath. The white man admitted that he had lost the way, in his poor Japanese, and pointed to the gash in his head, made where he had fallen on a jagged rock. He had this roughly bandaged, and the cloth was stained red.

He had been fed, his wound was washed, a well-trained *ue-san* given him to ease the pain. He had slept heavily; meanwhile the runner from Hokano spread his story.

The white man, breakfasting, asked what the excitement was. When he heard the tale he said, in English:

"A blinkin' devil!" and laughed.

At first thought he was inclined to see the thing through. Caution overcame curiosity. His attention must be put on reaching the near seacoast. Noshiro was dangerous now; he would take a junk from some out-of-the-way cove farther north, where there was no telegraph.

He paid his reckoning, and was on the street outside the inn at the exact moment the old priest of Hokano was a hundred yards distant from the village's boundary of bamboo-fence. The two met on the path leading northward. The priest bowed politely, and the lowering of his head revealed a Japanese urchin behind him.

There was an instant's breath-gulping, and then the priest was grabbed by tiny clawlike fingers.

"It is the demon!" the urchin wailed. "We are about to die!"

"The child has been frightened," the priest said gently to the Kid. "Do not mind him, please. He is very young and foolish—and afraid."

"It is! It is!" the child insisted. "The teeth! Of gold!"

The old priest knew well enough—is it not in the Fourth Book?—that demons can assume any shape they desire, although some one feature remains unchanged and demonlike. His bland old face remained smiling, although his head worked swiftly.

"I must explain," he said suavely, although his old knees shook. "You, being a *seiyo-jin* of elevated learning, will understand our situation. A demon has been about. Would you return to Sandoro with us, and inform us of the best way to rid the countryside of him?"

The priest had in mind getting the white man—or demon—back to Sandoro, where, if something happened, help would be at hand.

"What did the devil do?" the Kid asked.

"*Hai!* A white man died near my village. While we prepared to satisfy his gods and his spirit, a demon arrived and whisked away the body!"

It was swiftly said. The priest feared that it might anger this white man, if he were the demon.

The Kid got the meaning, grinned, and then wiped off the expression. What an ending! It almost recompensed him for the night spent in scouring the hills, torn by brush and tumbled into unexpected streams with pointed rocks. What a story it would make! If authorities went after Sam's body, they'd be told a demon had taken it! Lor', what a yarn!

THE KID'S discovery of Sam had been no accident. He had circled Odate after his escape, crossing path after path, and examining each one for a trace of Sam—not the paths alone, but the easy going near them, in the bushes. He had been finally rewarded by finding, in the light, white soil, a dark spot, and had followed it, now losing the way, now forced to try several intersecting paths until he came to the telltale blood again. Sometimes, finding no marks, no heel-prints offering indentations to his searching fingers, he became alarmed, and smashed through the undergrowth wildly, to come back to the path again blindly, or to be

forced to search and search for it, going uphill or down, depending on how he had come.

And at the last he had found Sammy—Sammy, crawled under a bunch of shrub, to die like any other dog. Sammy was dead when the Kid found him, which was just as well for Sam. The Kid's journey had helped his temper little. The Kid grabbed him up, hurried by the sound of voices and a fire on the other side of the bamboo—grabbed him just in time, for some one peered through the bushes on the far side—the Kid had glared at whoever it was, insanelly. He had carried Sam into the hills, ripped every garment apart with his sharp knife, and finally discovered the money in one of Sam's shoes.

As easy as easy!

NOW, what Japanese was a match for a white man? Why not go back a minute or two, an' kid the yella-bellies along? Tell 'em (touch of inspiration) to look out for a white man, a li'l feller, dressed like a Jap! That'd slow up foxy Merwin!

The child continued whimpering, while his guardian priest gave him soft assurance. Nevertheless the scrawny body trembled with terror.

The Kid said incorrectly: "*Mairimasu*—I will come." He turned to go with the priest back to Sandoro—stopped.

He heard some one speaking, the words growing more distinct. What they were, he did not know. He stood stock-still, knowing from the crisp divisions between words that a white man spoke. A white man. Undoubtedly Merwin.

He snarled: "If you say you have met me, I'll come back an' bump you all off." Since he said it in English, the priest's eyes bulged with fright. Devil-talk! "*Achi ike!*" the Kid added. "Get away!"

The old priest was too slow. The Kid shoved him fiercely to one side. Damn it, why hadn't he gone on last night, exhausted as he was? The priest stumbled, fell; the urchin, too insane with fright to know that any sound would draw attention to himself, wailed in a high, carrying, terror-consumed voice:

"*Okka! Okka-san! Mother!*"

The second that the Kid took to strike the child was the difference between his being out of sight and into the bushes, or being visible as Merwin and Okyo came around a bend in the path; Merwin and

Okyo, looking—as other pairs did also—for the very man they saw now.

Okyo afterwards said that he himself started to run ahead, but that his friend Merwin-san covered the twenty paces in one leap, and so was actually eligible for demonship by reason of being able to fly.

The Kid delayed a split-second between flight or preparing for trouble—long enough so that Merwin was on him before the Kid's knife was out of its sheath.

Merwin had no intention of standing up and fighting. He wanted the brute in his arms; he wanted, in spite of the difference in size, to crush the other down. Actually, he wound his arms about the larger man so he could not draw his knife, although one arm was free.

The Kid pounded Merwin with that arm a dozen times in as many seconds, all on the top of the head. Each blow shook the smaller man, but caused him to hold the tighter. He made little noises in his throat, and hung on. The Kid lifted, and they went down, Merwin underneath. Okyo raised his voice for help, dancing all the time about the pair, and gesticulating to the old priest. In one hand Okyo held a revolver—the only one in Odate that would shoot—but had forgotten all about it. Between cries he yelled:

"Merwin-san! That is no way to lick him! *Hai!* Get up on top!"

THE Kid tried to free himself completely, and stopped smashing the other's head against the sand on the path; Merwin released his grasp and slid swiftly from under the Kid. The bulkier man was slower, and Merwin was on him sidewise before he could turn, or get out his knife. The little man was gleefully busy now, and all over the Kid at once. The Kid heaved, and they rolled over and over along the path.

The villagers of Sandoro peered one after another at the scene. They remained in the bushes, taking no chances at this devil-business.

Okyo jumped up and down, and then, remembering his gun, yelled:

"I am going to shoot some one!"

He was implored by many voices to kill the demon—if he knew which one it was.

Merwin grunted, panting, "Leave—him—alone. I've—got him."

Okyo was not so certain of this. Since the old priest was pouring the story of the demon in Okyo's ear, the mayor of Odate was not sure of anything.

Merwin added to the babel by screaming. The Kid had sunk his teeth into the wounded shoulder. Pain sent the smaller man raging. Such pain as might be met in only two ways—submission, or rage to point of madness; there was no middle course. Merwin took the latter. He forgot what he was fighting for—life as well as revenge. He forgot everything save the beast so close to him.

HE tightened his grip, the wild clutch missing, and brought the Kid's jacket from the other's back. The Kid was an instant freed, and made a snatch toward his sheath; instinctively Merwin's hand clawed catlike after the Kid's.

Both had the knife. The Kid's fingers were about the haft. Merwin's hand was over the Kid's.

Little Merwin recognized the danger hazily. The Kid would force that knife inexorably into position. Merwin's strength was waning fast; his injured shoulder throbbed and burned.

He made his last effort, not knowing what would follow it, nor if he could summon strength and endurance for another. Holding tightly to the knife-haft, over the Kid's hand, he twined his other arm fiercely close about the other—dug his knees into the sand, half-rising, and shoved against the big man with all the force there was in him. Despairingly, not with exultation. A final effort!

They rolled once more; the Kid had expected Merwin to fight for the knife, and was unprepared for this idiotic onslaught.

Merwin felt the hand under the Kid grow sticky and warm, and for a moment he thought dully that his shoulder was bleeding again. Then he heard the other cry with pain and fright, and relax against him.

Two contesting hands had kept the knife nearly erect, and pointing toward the struggling bodies. The Kid had found the blade with his body.

The Kid rolled away in anguish.

"I'm a-dyin'," he wailed. "Oh, Gawd, but it hurts! A-dyin'!"

Merwin came slowly to his feet, watching the squirming figure.

"I've killed him," he said, and sighed gustily.

"No," Okyo said calmly. "He only thinks he is dying. He will—but only at the proper time. Not through your doing, my friend."

The old priest dropped beside the bleeding Kid, examining the wound, while the big sailor moaned and whined fearfully.

"It is nothing," the priest announced. "See—a scratch only."

The Kid stopped his whimpering, felt his side, and rolled an eye toward the bushes.

"Lie still," Okyo commanded. "Or my gun will finish what Merwin-san so ably began."

The Kid looked up. He saw the grinning brown circle of faces, bravely close now that the demon had been driven out of the *seiyo-jin's* great body with the blood. The Kid heard what was said.

What'd they have on him? Nothin'. Let'm look for Sam—Sammy was bloomin' well planted! That telephone-coolie in Yokohama might squawk, but what was robb'ry? Two years—maybe five. Had anyone *seen* him fix Sammy? No!

So the Kid figured. However—

When they brought him to trial at Iwariki, he had a white lawyer who occasionally helped the boys out when they got in a little trouble. The lawyer did his best, since the Kid had agreed to make an assignment of wages after he got out of jail—if he got out. Three black-robed, miter-capped judges listened to the lawyer, and then listened to the apologetic Kid, all downcast eyes and innocence. They then heard the tale of an old priest and a little Japanese boy—and found enough therein to hang the Kid. The three were unanimous in their decision. . . .

MERWIN, back in Yokohama, sent no report to the big boss, other than that business was continuing as usual. No news worth mentioning, except that it looked as if herb prices were going up.

The big boss of the A-I (they have an interest in a dozen other concerns) fires a man for nothing greater than an error in a bill-of-lading. The cocktail crowd know that. Some of them have been fired from the A-I for just such reason, when rightfully they should have had the place kept for Merwin.

But Merwin, they will tell you, is the Old Man's baby, his pet. Some day the Old Man will get wise, and discover what everyone else knows—sufficient cause to fire any white man in any concern in the Orient—that Andy Merwin got in a jam up Odate way over a woman!



The Zulu Assegai

This ingenious detective story has all that fine allure which makes this type of fiction, at its best, so specially attractive.

By VINCENT STARRETT

ANTHONY WICKER stood upon the stone doorstep of his home and pondered the situation. He had closed the inner door behind him only a moment before. He knew that his recent restlessness had worried his parents, but just now he had more important matters upon his mind. For an instant he stood there, looking out into the dark street; then he turned to face the house.

Looking upward, young Mr. Wicker could see the light that gleamed in the second-story window, and felt justified in believing the occupant of the flat at home. By the same token, so also were the occupants of the third and upper apartment. His gaze returned to the street, the length of which he thoughtfully considered from end to end. For a moment he appeared to be about to descend the steps; then thinking better of the resolution, he turned squarely about and with excessive caution reentered the outer hallway of his own building.

Two doors now confronted him. One was his own, and would lead him back to his anxious parents; the other opened onto a stairway leading upward to the higher floors. He tried the knob of this second door, and finding that it turned easily, swiftly pulled the door open and entered. Once more he hesitated, then the latch clicked and he was alone on the stairs. With careful steps he began to mount the flight.

Hardly five minutes had passed when Mr. and Mrs. Baird Wicker, in the lower flat, were startled to hear a shot in the rooms above, followed at once by a metallic crash, and the thud of a falling body. Both sprang to their feet in alarm, and instinctively each turned toward the door, then stopped and looked at each other.

"What was it?" choked the woman, after an instant of clamorous silence.

Baird Wicker's jaw set. "It was a revolver-shot," he said. "Somebody's been—shot—upstairs!"



Photograph by Eugene Hutchinson

VINCENT STARRETT

THE author of the fascinating detective story which begins on the opposite page is a well-known Chicago writing man—poet, editor, lecturer and fiction-writer. When you have finished his absorbing story of a strange crime, you will, without doubt, join us in looking forward to his future work with special interest.

Coming closer, hurriedly, his wife clung to his arm.

"Mr. Varges?" she breathed.

"He's the only one up there," answered the man, in the same low tone.

There followed another moment of portentous silence; then suddenly the man shook away the woman's arm.

"I've got to go up," he said.

"Baird!" Her cry was one of terror. Again she grasped his arm. "You'll be killed!"

The suggestion seemed to nettle him.

"No, I won't," he replied. "The shooting's over. Anyway, I *must* go—don't you see that I must? Varges may be there—dying!"

"Dead!" gasped the woman.

"Well, I can't be hurt by a dead man," argued the husband obstinately. He realized, none the less, that he was in no haste to ascend the stairs. "I'll just look out of the front door," he added. "Maybe I can see a policeman."

"There's never one in this block," said the woman. "The telephone, Baird! You can telephone to the police!"

Wicker breathed a sigh of relief.

"That's a good idea," he admitted, wondering why he had not thought of it himself. "That's just what I'll do!" Something still stayed him. "Look here, Margaret, you call the police, while I take a look out of the door. The number's on the cover of the phone-book."

HE hurried to the front door, opened it with something of an effort, and put his head out. He listened in futile fashion at the closed door leading to the upper flats. Somewhere on the stairs he heard soft footsteps, moving either up or down—he could not tell which. His heart beat rapidly. Then beyond the glass of the outer street door he saw something that filled him with gladness. Miraculous as was the circumstance, he saw a policeman in full uniform, passing in the glow of an arc-light, across the street. He tore open the outer door and shouted.

The man in uniform stopped at the call, and regarded the interrupter of his stroll. Then slowly he came across the street and halted at the foot of the steps.

"What's the trouble?" he asked gruffly.

"I'm afraid it's—murder!" panted Baird Wicker; and the word sounded thick, and full, and horrible as it came from his lips. He could taste blood on his palate.

"What!" cried the policeman, startled in turn. "Where?"

"Upstairs," said Baird Wicker. "Above us! We heard a shot—and somebody fell down!"

The uniform began to ascend the steps. Wicker saw its approach with increasing happiness.

"How long ago?" demanded the policeman suspiciously.

"Just now! No more than five minutes ago! My wife's calling the police now!"

His words and phrases came out capped with exclamation points. As he spoke, Mrs. Wicker appeared suddenly, and gasped with delight at sight of the uniform.

"Oh, I'm glad!" she cried. "I couldn't get anybody. Our line was busy. Mr. Varges has been murdered!"

"What his name?" asked the officer. "Fargess?" Suddenly he decided to look into the matter. "Have you been upstairs?"

"No," said Wicker. "I was just going; but my wife was—"

"All right," interrupted the policeman. "Come on! We'll go up now."

He finished the ascent of the stair-flight, and jerked open the door leading into the outer hall. Wicker remembered the steps he had heard on the stairs, and spoke quickly:

"I heard some one moving around—"

As he spoke, the door leading to the upper stories opened, and a young man slipped through and collided with the well-filled uniform. The face of the newcomer was white, but it went whiter at the contact. He shuddered and drew back, but the policeman's hand was on his shoulder. There was a confused moment in which the Wickers, concealed by the policeman's bulk, could see nothing. They knew only that something had occurred.

"Just a minute, just a minute," soothed the officer with heavy irony. "There's no hurry, you know, young feller! Now who do *you* happen to be?"

With a quick, savage wrench, he swung the white-faced youth around so that he looked into the eyes of the others.

"Anthony!" shrieked Mrs. Wicker, and grasped at the policeman's arm.

"My God!" whispered Baird Wicker. "Anthony!"

JIMMY LAVENDER listened quietly as Prendergast of the Sheffield Station told the story. The burly lieutenant, used to

romancing for reporters and skilled in presenting evidence in courtrooms, made the most of his dramatic tale.

"Well," said he, his little eyes twinkling, "there was the situation, and a very interesting one, Jimmy, my boy. The lad, sneaking downstairs after the crime, is unmasked and identified, as 'twere, by his own parents, while an officer of the law looks on. What do you think of it?"

"I think you're concealing something," smiled Lavender. "You didn't come here to tell me just that, Lieutenant. It's dramatic, of course, as far as you've gone; but you're not finished. You're up a tree, somehow, or you wouldn't be here."

Lieutenant Prendergast grinned appreciatively, and resumed his narrative:

"Well, you're right! That's only part of it. The rest of it goes like this: Wicker and his wife are there when Macfall grabs their son, and naturally they clamped padlocks on their mouths as soon as they found out what they'd done. First, though, they said the boy had gone out just a minute before, and couldn't have had anything to do with the shooting. They said he'd probably heard the shot too, and run upstairs to investigate. It might have got by, only the boy himself knocked it in the head. He admitted he'd gone upstairs to see this man Vargas, but before he could rap on the door, he said the shot was fired inside, and it scared him so he didn't do anything but stand and shake."

"**H**OW long did he stand and shake?" asked Lavender.

"As nearly as we can get at it, about ten minutes. We didn't like his statement, so we kept at him. Then he said he only stood for a minute or two, after which he started upstairs to the third floor—that's the top—to call for help. Family named Neptune up there; but he didn't know 'em very well, so he stopped outside *that* door to listen. And right inside, almost against his ear, he heard Neptune telephoning for the police. Neptune had heard the shot too. After that, Wicker says he began to think, and he realized he was probably in for trouble. It fussed him so he didn't know what to do, he says. Finally he sneaked downstairs, intending to get into his own place and stay there, but in the hall he bumped into Macfall, the officer on the beat, who grabbed him. Mrs. Wicker nearly fainted, and Macfall had his hands full for a few minutes.

"Well, they all went upstairs; and sure enough, the door was apparently locked inside. It's a point in favor of young Wicker, I'll admit; but he might have managed to lock the door from the outside and throw away the key. There was no key in the lock. We broke in the door—"

"If there was no key in the lock, how do you know the door had been locked from the inside?" demanded Lavender.

"We don't exactly know it," admitted Prendergast. "I only said apparently."

"Go on!"

"Well, we broke in the door—and what do you think we found?"

LAVENDER raised his eyebrows. "That Vargas hadn't been murdered at all?" he asked.

The police lieutenant stared his surprise and admiration. "Jimmy," said he, "how did you guess that?"

"That's it," replied Lavender with a smile, "I just guessed it—from your own tale. You were evidently leading up to something that bothered you, something out of the ordinary police experience—and your final question gave you away. You asked, 'What do you think we found?'—so obviously you found what you didn't expect to find. You expected to find the body of Vargas—from which I concluded that you had found nothing of the sort."

"Very clever," said Prendergast dryly, "and you happen to be right; but I'm not through yet. We didn't find Vargas—but we *did* find a body! Yes sir, a man's body—and he wasn't shot!"

"Not shot?" echoed Lavender, genuinely surprised.

"He'd been stabbed," said the lieutenant. "Stabbed in the throat with a long spear; an *agga—agga*—something funny, anyway!"

"Not an assegai!"

"That's the very thing. An assegai! The kind they use in the heart of Africa!"

Lavender's brow was creased for a long moment, while Prendergast enjoyed his triumph.

"I begin to see why you're here," said the young detective, at length. "Well, Prendergast, whose *was* the body?"

"That," said the lieutenant, "is what we don't know. In fact," he continued frankly, "there are a lot of things we don't know. We don't often ask for help."

"Young Wicker didn't recognize the dead man?"

"Not young Wicker nor anybody else," said the officer emphatically. "Now what do you think?"

"I think a great many things," replied Lavender. "Too many! Only one thing seems certain: that the incentive for all this goes back a long way. Perhaps even that isn't certain. Nothing on the dead man to help identify him, of course?"

"Not a thing that we found, anyway."

"Was there a key in his pocket, by the way? An ordinary door-key?"

"There was," said Prendergast. "What of it?"

"It is probably the key to the door," replied Lavender. "You should have tried it."

He thought deeply again for some minutes, then made up his mind.

"Well, Mike, what do you want me to do?"

Prendergast became suddenly apologetic.

"The fact is, Jimmy," said he, "we want you to give us a lift, and to be very quiet about it. 'Twas my own idea. I said to the Captain: 'Lavender's the man to help us. Give me leave to call in Jimmy Lavender, and the case is as good as solved.' I really did, Jimmy!"

Lavender grinned at the transparent flattery. "All right, Mike," he said genially, "but just what am I supposed to do? Identify the dead man?"

"Well, yes, partly that; and partly discover who killed him. You see, we've got young Wicker locked up, and there we'll keep him too, until he's proved innocent. We can't let him go, you know. He *may* be the man! Then again, he may not. Anyway, he's all we've got. It's up to you to help us find this fellow Varges too. He's missing, and the back door unlocked."

"HASN'T it occurred to you that Varges may be the murderer?" asked Lavender.

"It has, it has," admitted Prendergast airily. "'Twas my first thought, after I thought young Wicker maybe wasn't lying. But you may be sure of one thing, Jimmy. Young Wicker'll suffer for it, if we don't find somebody else! That's why I thought of *you*. 'Twas my idea that you could appear to be acting for young Wicker, see? Your job would be to clear the boy. You would talk with him, and with his parents, and if they were concealing anything, it would come out."

"I see," murmured Lavender. "Well, I'll have to think it over, Lieutenant. If I think young Wicker is innocent, I'll do it. If I think there is a *chance* that he's innocent, I'll do it. But if, after my investigation, I don't see my way to continuing the case—well, you'll have to go ahead by yourself. I'm not a police agent, you know."

"Which suits me to a T," asserted the police officer. "When may we expect to hear from you?"

"I'll work in my own way, of course," stipulated Lavender, "and I won't report until I have something to report. But you'll probably hear from me within a day, as to whether I shall continue with the case."

"Loud cheers!" said Prendergast heartily. "Also, many thanks! The Captain'll be tickled; and I don't mind saying that I'm relieved myself."

Renewing his thanks at intervals, as he made for the door, the police officer went upon his way and left Lavender to his thoughts.

AT this point the perpendicular pronoun enters the tale, for the first thing my friend Lavender did was to call *me* upon the telephone. I had gone into my own diggings, a week before, and it pleased me to think that the detective missed his favorite audience. When I had joined him, he told me the story I have set down above.

"The police," said Lavender, "are playing safe. They're afraid of the obvious theory that Anthony Wicker committed the crime, although they're holding Wicker—whose actions certainly have been suspicious enough. In me, they have hired a sort of superior spy—or they *think* they have. I'm to win the confidence of the Wickers, and if I think Anthony to be guilty, I'm to tell them so, in effect, and then step out. I don't fancy the rôle, but there is an excellent chance that Wicker isn't guilty, and that I may be able to prove it. Prendergast knows that too, and knows it is that feature of the case that appeals to me. Very well, I'm willing to risk sending my client to prison. After all, it's a fascinating case, Gilruth!"

"An assegai!" said I, intrigued by the most romantic feature of the tale. "Where do you suppose the assegai came from, Jimmy?"

"It might have come from a curio shop,"

replied Lavender dryly. "However, I have to thank the assegai for the case. It was that strange instrument of murder that bothered the police, and made them ask for my assistance. Curious, isn't it? If this stranger had been shot, or stabbed with a kitchen knife, there would have been much less mystery for the police, and I'd have been playing golf this pleasant afternoon. So wags the world, Gilly! At least, so wags the police department of this corner of the world."

"You really see a chance to clear young Wicker?" I asked. "What d'you suppose he was doing on those stairs?"

"I don't know," replied Jimmy Lavender. "He may have been doing just what he says he was doing. It's plausible enough. What I should particularly like to know, is why he wanted to see Varges to begin with. Of course, that may have been a lie. There are several explanations of Anthony Wicker's movements last night. He may actually have been in the flat when the murder occurred and may now be shielding Varges. He may never have intended to go to Varges' flat. He may have been in the *third* flat, and for some reason be unable to explain why he was there, even though the visit had nothing to do with the murder in the flat below. He may be *protecting* somebody in the third flat, who *did* have something to do with the murder. He may even be protecting his own father and mother. We know nothing whatever except that he was caught leaving the stair-flight leading to the upper stories. There is nothing to show who or what left any flat of the three, by the *back* doors."

"And he may be the murderer himself," I contributed.

"Yes," admitted Lavender. "It is certainly possible."

"Although," I continued, "I prefer to believe, at present, that Varges committed the crime and then fled."

"It is the easiest solution," agreed my friend, "and probably it is the police solution, if the truth were known. The disappearance of Varges is, superficially, very much against him. Just as certainly, it is the salvation of Anthony Wicker. It is a very good thing for Wicker that the body found was *not* that of Varges."

"Ought not that to be proved up to the hilt?" I asked tentatively.

Lavender, in the act of lighting a cig-

arette, stopped and looked at me keenly.

"What are you suggesting, Gilly?" he asked. "There's something hellish in your hint."

"How do *we* know," I argued, "that the body is not that of Varges? How do the police know? Because the Wickers *said* it was not! Possibly because the third-floor people—what was the name? Neptune! Queer name that!—because the Neptunes said it was not. But if there was any collusion—and Varges had no friends—you see?"

"Yes," said Lavender; and he pinched my arm appreciatively. "It's a bit far-fetched, Gilly, but I admit the force of it. You are absolutely right about one thing. We can't take anyone's *word* for anything, at this stage of the case. The identification must be complete and final, before the puzzle can be intelligently solved."

"Somebody other than these people in the building must know Varges by sight," I urged.

"Quite so," agreed Lavender. "Suppose you call a taxi, Gilly, and we'll begin at once."

THE apartment of Thomas Varges tallied surprisingly with my preconceived ideas of its appearance. I had imagined the man as something of a recluse, but with a past whose souvenirs and memorials would deck his chambers. I suppose it was the assegai that put the notion into my head; and sure enough, the assegai was only one of a collection of queer and sinister instruments of slaughter hung about the place. There was a Malay *kris*, a magnificent claymore of undoubted antiquity, stilettoes in considerable profusion, and two fine *machetes*, not to mention the usual collection of old pistols, sword bayonets and the like, to be found in the rooms of most admirers of such paraphernalia. There were also a number of modern weapons of the highest workmanship, and sporting tackle of every sort.

At Lavender's request, the assegai had been returned to the flat by the police, with the revolver found beside the body of the stranger. Save that the body had been removed to a neighboring morgue, the apartment was much as it must have been the night before, when Macfall and the frightened Wickers broke down the door and gained entrance. Macfall himself we had borrowed long enough to hear his story first-hand.

ALL that my eyes beheld, Lavender too had seen, and in half the time. Now he stood in the exact center of the room and pivoted slowly upon his heel, reviewing everything in sight, and all that had passed. At length his gaze lingered on a spot of wall over an antique desk, where a gash in the plaster marked the entrance presumably of a bullet. He strode across and mounted the desk for a better view.

"Prendergast didn't mention this," he said. "Of course, he saw it. Nice of him not to bother me with his own theories! Here's where the bullet went in, Gilly. There was just the one shot fired, and the bullet went into the plaster here. It may have gone through, or it may be in the wall. It's pretty high, isn't it? Whoever fired it—Varges or the stranger—had his arm knocked up, or was a very bad shot. It's within two feet of the ceiling."

He examined the wall carefully on all sides of the wound in the plaster, and gently touched two or three spots with his finger. Then he climbed down from his perch, with an air of satisfaction, and disappeared into the room behind the mutilated wall.

The bullet had not passed through, and was evidently still imbedded in the wall. Once more Lavender mounted to the desk and probed in the gashed plaster.

"Upward," he murmured. "The lead passed in diagonally and went obliquely upward."

FROM the spot where approximately the stranger's body had lain, he took another view of the bullet-hole.

"I think the shot was not fired from this position," he said. Then calmly he stretched himself prone upon the rug. "Nor from this," he added, rising. He lighted one of his endless cigarettes and idly dusted himself. "Very interesting indeed! To have fired a bullet into the wall as he did fire it, the man who held the revolver must have been quite close to the desk there." He walked across to it. "About here. See how glancingly the lead went into the wall." He indicated its course with an upward thrust of his finger. "Yet the shot must have been fired *after* some one, if I am right; presumably after some one leaving the room. Was the fellow's arm jogged? But who was here to jog it?"

Once more he mounted to the desk and examined the plaster with the minutest

attention, on all sides of the bullet-hole. His eyes were sparkling when he came down.

"Very satisfactory, to date," he announced, "but it will require some proving."

I HAD been examining the strange weapon of death, in the meanwhile. Now I spoke to Lavender.

"The weapon hung upon the wall, of course," I said, "and it was snatched away quickly. See how the cord was violently broken."

He took the ponderous thing from my hands and looked it over carefully, then nodded.

"A brutal thing," he commented, "and a queer weapon to find in a modern flat. This Varges is an interesting person, and so is his deceased visitor. The man who wielded this would have to be a fairly powerful person. It is unusually heavy, even of its kind. A tough piece of cord, too. It required quite a pull to break it."

He looked at me rather quizzically, and from the center of the chamber took a final view of everything within sight, then calmly turned to depart.

"I think that's all, Gilly," said he. "Let's have our talk with the Neptunes and the Wickers, and get it over with."

"You don't mean to say that you're through?" I demanded in amazement. We had been in the place barely fifteen minutes.

"I'm through here," answered Lavender. "There wasn't much to see, you know."

He passed through the doorway with its sagging door, and turned for a close examination of the broken lock; but without comment. In a moment he had mounted the stairs toward the upper apartment.

"Of course, Gilly, you noticed the condition of the walls?" he asked suddenly.

"Why—not exactly," I admitted, surprised by the question. "They seemed quite like other walls to me. You don't mean to say you found fingerprints on that wall? It looked clean enough to me, from where I stood."

"It was very clean indeed," replied Lavender. "Not a finger-mark, and very little dust. On the whole, a very tell-tale wall. You should have examined it more carefully."

With which enigmatic remark he jammed his thumb into a bell and called to the upper door a pretty young woman who, it developed, was Mrs. Robert Neptune.

Our interview with Mrs. Neptune, however, was unproductive of any important information. The young woman told a very clear story that bore out the tale we already had heard: She and her husband had heard the shot, and the fall of the body, and her husband had called the police. They had not been in the flat below, and had no curiosity to enter. They knew Thomas Varges only by sight, and none too well even by sight. He was not often met upon the stairs; and there was no social intercourse between Varges and the Neptunes.

"Can you describe Mr. Varges for me?" asked Lavender.

"He is quite a small man," said Mrs. Neptune, "clean-shaven, and in middle life, I should say. A bit baldish, I think, and a bit wrinkled—his mouth-lines, that is, and his forehead; not the wrinkles of age. I don't suppose he's over about fifty-two."

"You heard no commotion at the back of the house, last night?" queried Lavender. "Nobody ran down the back stairs, after the shot was fired?"

"I didn't hear anything," replied the young woman. "Robert and I were both upset by the shooting, and our only thought was to tell the police. Some one might have run down."

"Do you know Anthony Wicker?"

THE question came suddenly and was in a somewhat sterner key. But Mrs. Robert Neptune was in no wise fluttered. "Yes, I know the whole Wicker family," she replied easily. "I know Anthony best, perhaps, because he and my husband are friendly. They are nearer of an age than my husband and Anthony's father. There is nothing intimate between the families, however. In summer we sit on the porch together and talk, and we have exchanged visits a few times."

"You know that Anthony Wicker and Mr. Varges were friends?"

"I know they were acquainted. Anthony liked Mr. Varges and often spoke of him. He thought Mr. Varges' flat very fascinating. It would be to a boy of nineteen, for Anthony says it is filled with curious things. Anthony was in the flat only a few times, I think; he told my husband about it, and wished he could go oftener, but Mr. Varges was not much of a man, apparently, for visitors. I think he let Anthony come a few times because he saw

that Anthony admired him; but I doubt if he really cared to have anybody visit him. He was very retiring, I should say. Except for Anthony, I never heard of anybody visiting him."

"I see! Well, I'm deeply obliged to you, Mrs. Neptune," said Lavender. "I'll not annoy you further."

And we tramped downstairs to the Wicker apartment in silence.

BAIRD WICKER was at home with his wife, and both greeted us civilly but with suspicion. When they heard our errand, they were more cordial.

"The fact is," explained Lavender, "I am interested in the case, and if I can help your son, I shall be glad to do it. My chief duty is to find the missing Varges, but by doing so I shall probably help to clear Anthony. I am inclined to believe he had nothing whatever to do with this affair."

"Of course he hadn't!" cried Mrs. Wicker. "He had no more to do with it than we did. It's ridiculous! And now they've got him in jail! I'm almost frantic, Mr. Lavender; but Baird thinks it will come out all right. He's hired a good lawyer for Anthony; but even the lawyer can't get our boy out of jail yet."

"No," said Lavender sympathetically. "The police haven't booked him yet. If they had done that, your lawyer could have asked for bail, and possibly have got him out. But he won't get a chance at bail until the police are reasonably sure he won't run away. Now, if you'll tell me everything from the beginning, I'll do my best to help you."

Alternately, with numerous interruptions of each other, the Wickers again told the tale we had heard several times before. In effect, it was the same story told by Prendergast, by Macfall, and by Mrs. Neptune, varying only in its point of view.

LAVENDER considered it all in silence, and at length asked a single question:

"Have you any idea why Anthony wanted to see Mr. Varges, last night?"

"No sir, we have not," answered Baird Wicker simply. "We suppose that he wanted to pay a little visit. He liked Mr. Varges, and liked his apartment; that's all we know."

"Then there is no more to be said at present. Obviously, you heard nothing at the back of the house, for according to

your statement you were both at the front, and you were both excited and alarmed. Thank you. And keep up your spirits; there is nothing to worry about, I assure you."

With the Wickers' blessing on his head, the detective left the building; and we two stood together on the pavement for a moment, looking up and down the street.

"I think," said Lavender, "we had better have a look at this dead man, Gilly. My opinion is strong that he isn't Varges, but it's as well to verify what we've heard. He's only a few blocks away. Suppose we stroll."

The gruesome visit, however, added, nothing to our stock of information. Supposing the description of Varges that we had heard from Mrs. Neptune—and from the police, as they had heard it from the Wickers—to be correct, the murdered man certainly was not Thomas Varges. There was hardly a point of resemblance.

IN the undertaker's reception-room, Lavender pulled two chairs together and sat down in one of them. He drew from his pocket a small leather-bound volume.

"Sit down, Gilly, and look at this," he said. "It's probably important. I picked it up in the bedroom at Varges' apartment—the room behind the sitting-room where the body was found. Evidently, Prendergast didn't search the place—probably hasn't got around to it. I've had only a moment to glance at this; but it's obviously a diary, and probably the diary of Thomas Varges."

He fluttered the leaves for a moment, then turned to the final entry, which he read carefully. It was a single sentence only, and might very well have been either innocent or guilty for all that it disclosed. It read:

"Saw V. again today, but he didn't see me, and naturally I didn't speak."

The date was one day before the death of the stranger in Varges' apartment.

"A very provocative statement," commented Lavender. "If this is not Varges' book, then the 'V' may refer to Varges. That might indicate that the diary is that of the stranger, and that he left it in Varges' flat. He could hardly have taken it away, in the circumstances. But how did it get into the bedroom? Could he have been surprised there by Varges? Well, well, perhaps the other entries will tell us some more. He says *'Saw V. again,'* so he may

have entered an account of his previous encounter. I'm glad of the masculine pronoun; at least, we don't have to worry about 'V' being a woman."

He began to turn pages rapidly, reading from the back of the little book toward the front. A puzzled frown sat above his eyes.

"This is certainly Varges' book," he said at length. "Every entry apparently has to do with local matters and the private accounts of such a man as Varges—references to his reading and his purchases, and here and there a bit of philosophy. Here, you see, a month back, is the record of Anthony's last visit: 'Young Wicker came up again, but he didn't stay long. A queer kid. He made me angry by his suggestion that I had been stringing him. Boys are shrewd little devils. Got rid of him, and read till midnight.' Now, what in the world does that mean? Looks like a quarrel. Anyway, it cinches one thing: this is Varges' book. I'll have to go through it with a fine comb."

For a moment he looked worried; then with a snap he closed the covers of the book and replaced it in his pocket.

"I think, Gilly," said my friend Lavender, "that the time has come to interview Mr. Anthony Wicker, on a number of subjects."

WE left the place and turned toward the nearest crossing, but a hail behind us halted our feet. Rapid footsteps were overtaking us, and I said in surprise: "Hello, Jimmy; here's Prendergast!"

"News written all over his face, too," muttered Lavender. "What's happened now, I wonder?"

The police lieutenant came up hurriedly, his broad face beaming. One would have thought that he had just solved the riddle of the sphinx.

"Hello there, you fellows," he grinned. "Thought I'd catch you here. Tried to telephone you at your rooms, Lavender. Well, it's as good as over!"

"The deuce it is!" said Lavender coolly. "It's hardly begun, Prendergast." But he was watching the officer with alert, questioning eyes.

"We've got a statement out of young Wicker," cheerfully continued the lieutenant. "And—what do you think?—he's admitted that he quarreled with Varges! They were on the 'outs' when Wicker went up to see him last night; and Varges

wouldn't let the boy in. As a matter of fact, he told him to 'Get the hell out of there!' But the question is: Did Anthony 'get'?"

TRAINED as he was in concealing his emotions, Lavender was distinctly startled. I knew it, whether or not Prendergast did, and my mind reverted at once to the line in Varges' diary. But Lavender's voice, when we heard it, was serene and untroubled.

A taxicab was coming down the street, and the detective's finger brought it to the curb in a wide sweep.

"Get in, Prendergast," said Lavender calmly. "In you go, Gilly. Where is Anthony now, Lieutenant? At Sheffield? Do you know where the Sheffield police station is, Driver? Take us there!"

He settled back in the cushions, and the taxicab began to bump away over the wood blocks of the old-fashioned street.

"You're not a liar, Prendergast," continued the detective, after a moment, "and I don't believe you'd force a man to confess to anything that wasn't true—although it's been done in this city. So I must assume that Anthony has made some such statement as you repeat. For a moment it knocked some of my ideas flat; but now I begin to see light again. Perhaps it will actually be a help. But I want to talk with Anthony as soon as possible."

"Fair enough," said Prendergast comfortably, and lighted a huge cigar, with the smoke of which he proceeded to fill the cab. He was undoubtedly very pleased with himself.

The rest of the ride was made in almost complete silence. Lavender's eyes were on the speeding panorama outside, but I knew his mind was turning over the statement of Anthony Wicker, and the passages in the diary of Thomas Varges, trying to patch all into the fabric of ingenious theory that he was creating to save the boy.

AT the Sheffield Station we went at once to the Captain's office, and in a few minutes Anthony Wicker was brought in. We saw a slim, pale youth of the college-boy type, but with dreamy dark eyes that suggested a fondness for study rather than athletics. Dark circles were under his lids, and his mouth was somewhat sulky. Prendergast introduced us, then Lavender took up the examination.

"Look here, Anthony," he said kindly, "I want you to understand, first of all, that I am your friend. As a matter of fact, I've been asked to look after you and to help to clear you. I'm not a policeman, and I'm not a lawyer. I've seen your parents, and they are willing to have me do what I can. Lieutenant Prendergast tells me that you have admitted having had a quarrel with Thomas Varges, who is now missing. There's no crime in that. He also tells me something more interesting—that you tried to see Varges, last night, and were roughly ordered away. Is that true?"

"Yes," said the boy, "it's true. He wouldn't let me in."

"He swore at you?"

"Well, sir, I knocked on the door, and he absolutely roared at me. He said to—"

"What were his exact words?"

"He said: 'Get the hell out of here!' I started to explain, and a minute later I heard the shot; then there was a crash, and a fall; and I started to leave in a hurry. I was scared. I thought he was shooting at me."

"His exact words were: 'Get the hell out of here!' Not 'out of there,' but 'out of here.' You are positive of that?"

"Yes sir, those were the exact words."

"He said them even before he knew who was knocking at the door?"

The boy looked surprised.

"Why, yes," he replied after a moment.

"Of course, I assumed he knew it was me—I, that is," he corrected himself. "Maybe he *didn't* know!"

"He didn't," said Lavender. "He had no idea you were outside the door. In point of fact, he didn't even hear you knock. Did you knock very loudly?"

Prendergast and the Captain were leaning forward in their surprise.

"Well, no," answered the boy, "not very loudly, as I remember it."

"Why did he order him to get the—to go away?" asked the Captain incredulously.

"He didn't," replied Lavender, undisturbed. "Now, Anthony, think carefully before you answer my next question. Are you quite sure it was Varges' voice you heard?"

This time the boy was deeply stirred. He started to reply, but stopped. At length, slowly, he answered the question:

"I'm not a fool, Mr. Lavender. I see what you mean. You think maybe it was this other man who spoke, and not Mr.

Vargès at all. And maybe it *was*! I didn't think of it till now, when you put it into my head; but come to think of it, it wasn't exactly Mr. Vargès' voice. It was heavier—and madder than I'd ever heard him. I thought he was very angry; that's why it didn't occur to me before. And anyway, you see I didn't know then that there was another man in the room. I didn't know anything about the strange man being killed till the lawyer told me today. I thought Mr. Vargès had killed himself, after I decided maybe he wasn't shooting at me. You see, I heard the shot, then a crash like heavy metal, then the fall of the body, I guess; and then just silence."

"Are you sure about the silence? There was no other sound?"

Again the boy thought deeply. At length he shook his head.

"I sort of thought," he said, "that I heard a door close; but I wasn't sure it was inside the flat. And I'm not very sure I really heard it."

LAVENDER'S smile was one of triumph. He leaned back in his chair, and drummed his fingertips on the Captain's desk. Nobody spoke for a moment. Then again the detective bent forward and resumed his questioning:

"Who is Mr. Vargès, Anthony?"

"I don't know," replied Anthony Wicker. "I've been asking myself that. Ever since I've been here, I've been wondering. He was in the house there, for a couple of years, I think; but I only got to know him about a year ago, and I was only in his rooms three times in my life. But I liked him. He knew a lot, and he was a good talker when you got him started. He'd traveled a lot, and the place was full of old weapons and things."

"How did you happen to go into his rooms the first time?"

"Well, I had some Indian arrowheads that a fellow gave me; and I was standing on the porch looking them over, when along came Mr. Vargès. He asked me what I had there, and I showed them to him. Then he asked me if I was interested in that sort of thing, and when I said I was, he said: 'Come on upstairs, and I'll show you some things that'll make your eyes stick out.' He was pretty nice about it, and I went up. And in his flat I saw all the spears and swords and things that *he'd* collected. After that, he just used to nod

to me; but one day, a long time after, he asked me up again, and showed me some new things he'd got, and told me a lot of stories. He'd been every place, it seemed—South America, Australia, Africa and so on."

"And the last time you saw him?" prompted Lavender. "That was when you quarreled?"

"YES," answered the boy. "It was about a month ago, I guess. I'd been up,—he asked me to,—and he'd been pretty nice to me; but the fact is, I'd been thinking about what he'd told me, and I thought I'd caught him in a couple of lies. As I remembered it, he'd told me stories that would have made him out to be in two places at once. I thought maybe he was stringing me, and it hurt. So that night, a month ago, I sort of joshed him about being in those two places at once, and I guess he didn't like it. He didn't say much, but I could see he was sore, and when I got up to go, he just opened the door for me, and let me out without a word. Afterward, whenever I'd try to speak to him, he'd just nod sort of gruffly and pass on. It worried me, and I—I wanted to be friends again. I thought about it a lot, and last night I made up my mind to go up and apologize to him. I wanted to tell him I was sorry. So I tried to—and this happened!"

"Excellent!" cried Lavender, springing to his feet. "That's all, Anthony, unless you can tell us where Mr. Vargès is now. Take a good think, and then tell me if you ever heard Mr. Vargès say anything about any enemies he had—anybody he was afraid of, or something like that."

Anthony Wicker bent his brows in thought, but nothing resulted.

"No," he answered, "I don't think he ever said anything like that."

Lavender shook the boy's hand, and clapped him upon the shoulder.

"We'll have you out of here soon," he promised. "Keep your nerve up, and if you think of anything else, let me know."

PRENDERGAST, with an almost imperceptible sneer for Lavender's promise of speedy release, got heavily to his feet and started to lead the boy from the room. On the doorsill, young Wicker turned.

"Say," he volunteered, "I just thought of something. You wanted to know if I knew where Mr. Vargès is now. Well, I don't

—but if he's run away because *he* killed that man, I'll bet I know where he's gone!"

"Good Lord!" murmured Lavender, with a strangled laugh. In a louder voice, he asked: "Where is he?"

"Well," said the boy, "maybe he isn't there, either; but I heard him say, once, that he had a cottage—a fishing cottage—on the Fox River, up near Cary. Maybe he's gone up there."

A slow smile spread over Lavender's face. "Good idea, Anthony," he chuckled. "Maybe he has. We'll look!"

The door closed behind Prendergast and his charge. Lavender walked to the window, smiling. He said nothing, however, and no more words were spoken until Prendergast had returned, although Lavender's mood was so merry that we knew something had occurred to clear his mind of perplexities. Not till the lieutenant again stood beside us did the jovial young man condescend to speak his thoughts.

"Well, Mike," he observed, "you were right. It's about over. I suppose you can spare a man to send after Varges?"

Lieutenant Prendergast stared; then he grinned.

"I suppose you're kidding," he responded amiably, "but if you'll furnish Varges' address, I'll furnish the man to bring him in."

"I can't do that," said Lavender, "but I'll give you the address of a man who can. I haven't a doubt in the world that Anthony is right, and that Varges has gone to his cottage on the river. It's just what he would do, if I read him rightly. Send your man to Abe Marshall, at the Winsor House, in Cary, and ask Marshall if he's seen anything of Varges. I'll warrant he has. He knows everybody in that part of the State, and when they come, and where they go. Tell Marshall I want to know; he's a friend of mine. And be sure to tell your man to tell Varges, when he finds him, that this other man—whatever his name is—this dead man—is really dead."

"I guess Varges'll know that without telling," grunted the Captain. "If he killed him, he'll hardly need telling about it."

"He didn't kill him," said Lavender. "He doesn't know that he's dead. He'll be glad to know, though, for he'll know that now he can safely come home."

Prendergast looked his skepticism.

"I mean it, Mike," added Lavender seriously. "This is an open-and-shut-case from now on. Either Varges is there, or he'll be there sooner or later. If he isn't there, have

your man wait till he gets there. Don't bother to arrest him. He isn't a murderer. He's chiefly a liar and a coward. Tell him his friend—or his enemy—is dead, and he'll come home without handcuffs."

"I don't know whether you're crazy or I am, Jimmy," roared Prendergast, pounding his fist on the desk, "but I'm going to do what you say. Yet if Varges didn't kill this fellow, and Wicker didn't either, will you tell me who *did*?"

"Yes," said Lavender: "he killed himself. But of course he didn't mean to. He meant to kill Varges. It's a queer story, but it all hangs together; and when you've got Varges for me, I'll prove it up to the hilt. How about it?"

"Abe Marshall, Winsor House, Cary,'" growled Prendergast, writing ponderously on a pad of paper. "I'll wire you tonight. I'm going up myself!"

THAT night we sat together in Lavender's rooms, and waited the wire from Prendergast. I was burning with curiosity to hear Lavender's account of his investigations, and after a time, as we smoked, he yielded to my solicitations. It had been his own plan to wait for the coming of Varges to verify the story.

"It's an old rule in the detective business, Gilly," said he, "that when theories do not fit the facts, they must be made to fit. As a matter of fact, it is a very unsafe thing to do; for the question arises, inevitably, what *are* the facts?"

"The first alleged fact in the present case is assumed to be the murder of this stranger in Varges' rooms. But he wasn't murdered at all. Nor did he commit suicide.

"The shot into the wall, as I demonstrated, was fired from a position near the desk; it entered the wall obliquely upward, as if the man's arm had been knocked up at the instant of his firing. I examined that wall with the greatest care, and it was evident that the assegai had hung upon it. The position was faintly but plainly marked by the line of dust. You know how the removal of any object from a wall leaves the space behind the object whiter than the rest of the surface! The position of the assegai was plain to a practiced eye. Then you called my attention to the broken cord, still attached to the weapon. But it didn't look so much broken, to me, as it did *clipped*—not, however, by a knife. It occurred to me that it had been *shot* through. Do you begin to see what I mean?"

"But what of Vargas? It was still conceivable that he had wielded the weapon. Anthony's story settled that for me. I imagined what might have happened, and Anthony verified it, unconsciously, at almost every point. The stranger obviously was shooting at somebody; he wasn't firing into the wall for amusement. I assumed that he was shooting at Vargas, who was probably running toward the back. You remember his cry—which Anthony thought was directed at him! He didn't say 'Get out of *there*!' but 'Get out of *here*!' Obviously he was not shouting at Anthony at all, but at some one in the room. He was shouting, therefore, at Vargas. The shot followed instantly.

"Now what happens? There is a *metallic crash*, then the fall of a body. The crash can only have been the fall of the spear from the wall, and the body that fell was certainly that of this stranger. I suggest, therefore, that the stranger's shot entered the wall after first clipping the cord that held up the assegai, and that the assegai fell to the desk, butt first, and then pitched over, point first, into the throat of the man who stood near by! Vargas meanwhile was making all speed to get out at the back, and he *did* get out, frightened half to death, without realizing what had occurred in the room behind him. The sticking point is, why was the stranger's aim deflected so that his shot clipped the cord that held the assegai? There is only one possible explanation. Anthony's knock turned the trick!

"You may object, if you want to, that Anthony's knock was unheard, as I myself said to Anthony. I think perhaps it was—in a way. It is difficult to state the exact chronology of events, for everything happened so quickly; but I am certain that this is what occurred: I think that the man's cry, 'Get out of here!' was uttered a fraction of an instant *before* Anthony knocked. In the next breath—so rapidly did the rest follow—Anthony's knock fell on the panels; and the shot was fired simultaneously. The stranger didn't hear the knock, but he *sensed* something in the instant of firing; he may even have *thought* he heard something. The thought, or any minor distraction, would be sufficient. His arm wavered upward, and instead of shooting Vargas, fleeing through the doorway, he shot glancingly upward into the wall, and cut the cord that brought the spear down onto him!"

"How much of all this can you prove, Jimmy?" I asked.

"Enough, I think, to clear Wicker," replied Lavender, "and even to clear Vargas. It would be a fantastic tale, if I couldn't back it up, and the police wouldn't listen for a minute. First, I am sure that the key found in the stranger's pocket is the key to Vargas' front door. It can be tried; but I don't need that proof. I think, however, that he locked the door and pocketed the key, to force Vargas to stay and listen to him. Second, when I examined the wall closely for the second time, I found in the gashed plaster a tiny shred of hemp from the cord that had been shot through. I think more of it—enough to prove my point—could be found if we dug the lead from the wall. Third, although the spear fell onto a mat, when it struck the desk, there is a dent *under* the mat, in the wood of the desk. Then, there is Vargas' diary, which suggests at least that there is some one he does not want to see. Finally, there is Vargas himself. I am positive I am right, and I expect Vargas in some degree to corroborate my deductions. If he bears me out in part, the rest is bound to be true."

I thought it over at some length.

"I can't dispute you, Jimmy," I said at last. "It's darned clever, and I hope it's true; but who is the 'V' whom Vargas is trying to avoid?"

"What's to prevent his being this stranger?" demanded Lavender. "There is more than one name in the world beginning with that letter! However, I don't mind admitting to you, privately, Gilly, that somewhere along the line there is something that I haven't fathomed. I feel it rather than know it. I wonder what it is?"

NOT until one o'clock in the morning did we know, and Vargas himself supplied the information. He was in the tow of the burly Prendergast when we had our first view of him, at the Sheffield Station, whither we had been hastily summoned.

"Didn't get a chance to wire you, Lavender," said the officer. "Had to catch the last train, and couldn't stop. Yep, this is Vargas, and I must say you were right about him. He came along like a lamb. Marshall didn't know him, but he knew a stranger was on the river; and sure enough, the stranger was Vargas!"

"No," said the man called Vargas. "My name is Rantoul. Vargas is dead! That's why I came back."

Prendergast's jaw dropped; but Lavender's eyes suddenly sparkled, and he pinched my arm, as if to say: "Here it comes, Gilly!"

"I'll tell you the story," continued the prisoner. "Varges and I were partners, years ago, out in San Francisco. We had an antique-shop, where we sold old things—principally old weapons, and that sort of thing—and sporting goods and pictures, mostly to the motion-picture industry.

"We made a lot of money. I wanted to retire, at last, but Varges wouldn't hear of it. He was mad about money. Later I found out what he was up to; he'd been stealing the firm's cash. I didn't know it, until one day he didn't show up; and I investigated and found that he'd pretty well looted the bank-account.

"He was caught. I testified against him, and he was put away for eight years. He swore he'd get even with me when they took him away; and I knew he would if he could. So as soon as he was locked up, I turned all the stock into money, took what was left of the bank-account, and lit out myself. It was a pretty good haul, to tell the truth, for the stock brought more than I'd figured. Anyway, I was satisfied. I came to Chicago, and retired, as I'd always wanted to. But I knew that Varges would hunt for me, as soon as he was free, and the first thing I did, on locating here, was to change my name. I thought it over, and decided that the name Varges would be least likely to look for, when he started to trail me, would be his own name. So I took the name Varges.

"That's about all, except that he found me at last. I saw him twice, and knew he was hunting me in Chicago; but I felt pretty safe, like a fool, until last night when he came to the flat. I don't know how he found I was there. He must have seen me when I didn't know it, and trailed me home. Well, he came; and I let him in. I had to. The first thing he did was to lock the door and pocket the key. Then he laid into me. I needn't go into that. Finally he demanded money, and he wanted pretty nearly all I had. I refused, and tried to get him to listen to reason. I told him he'd had nearly all that was coming to him; but he said it was gone. He'd planted it till he got out, you know; I never saw it after he was arrested.

"We argued for some time, and then we both got mad. I was afraid of him, and

I told him I'd call for the police and turn him over as a blackmailer.

"Then he drew his gun, and I jumped for the kitchen. I heard him yell, 'Get out of here—get the hell out of here!'—something of the sort; and then he fired. He missed me, and I got out and ran. I thought he'd follow, and I ran for blocks before I stopped. I didn't know what to do; but my first thought was to get out of town, for I thought Varges would keep after me. The only place I could go, that I could think of, was my cottage, and—well, that's all!"

LAVENDER was quietly smiling as the man called Rantoul, whom we had known as Varges, finished his story.

"Why do you suppose he missed you?" he asked. "Was he such a bad shot?"

"I don't know," replied Rantoul. "I remember something rang and crashed *after* the shot, and I thought he'd hit one of the shields on the wall—there's one over the door leading into the kitchen."

"You heard nothing else? Nobody at the front door? Young Anthony Wicker, for instance?"

Rantoul was puzzled.

"No," he said, "I was too busy getting out to hear anything else. What was Wicker doing at the door?"

Lavender laughed cheerfully.

"Came up to visit you, I guess," he answered, "but you were too busy getting out. Prendergast, I'm ready to prove my case whenever you say. Wicker should be released tonight. Varges was killed by his own act, as I said before, and I submit that Rantoul's story corroborates mine in every detail."

"I haven't heard yours yet," said Prendergast cautiously, "but I'll let young Wicker go home, anyway. You're *always* right, confound you! But what about this man Rantoul, Jimmy? What can I hold *him* for?"

"Nothing, I guess," replied Lavender. "Why hold anybody? Say—hold on a minute! I think you'd better keep him here tonight. I don't want him going home and cleaning things up, until I've proved my case. Bring him over in the morning, and I'll illustrate in words of one syllable how Thomas Varges died."

He looked at his watch, and added:

"But not too early! Gilly and I will probably do some important sleeping between now and ten o'clock!"

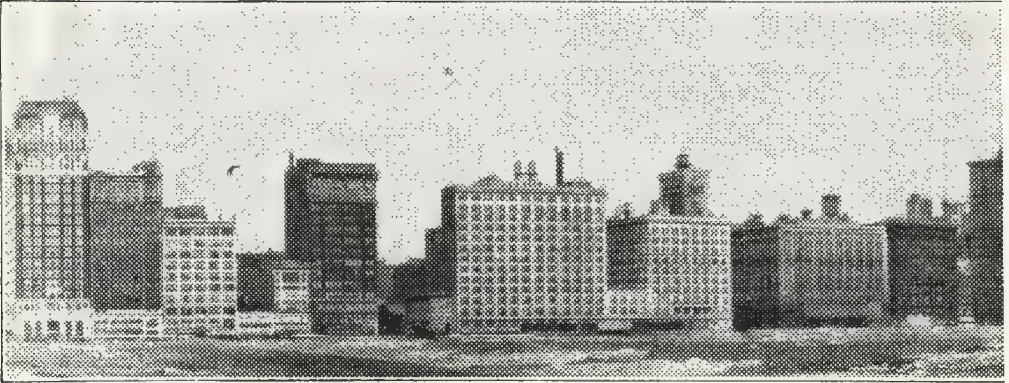


Photo by Kaufmann & Fabry Co.

The Black

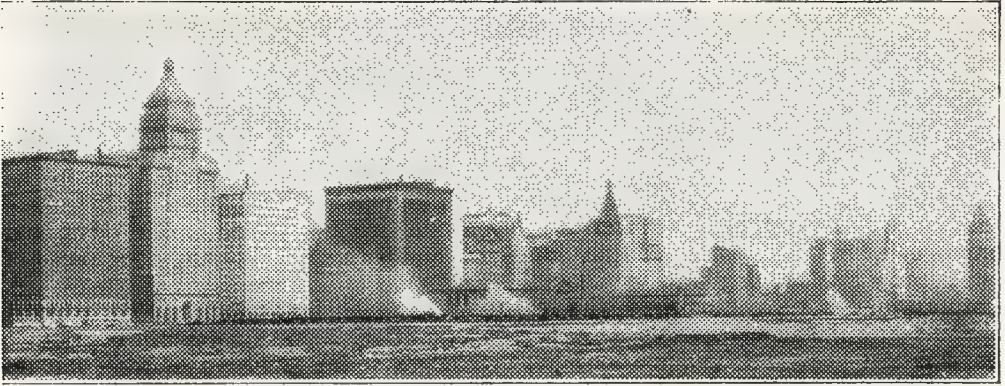
When we printed Dr. Knapp's "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin," the story of a transplanted brain, a storm of discussion followed. This new story—wherein a comet interferes with the affairs of earth and sends a tidal wave against Chicago (whose lake front is pictured above)—will provoke even greater interest.

WHEN so many people have written on the Black Star, it seems strange that I, who am not a writing man, should join the throng. It is all the stranger since I played no noteworthy part in the scenes of heroism and disorder, of panic and sacrifice, which attended the passing of the most unwelcome visitor from the skies. But that fact, my daughter says, is the very reason why I must write. She tells me that though not a prominent actor myself, I had a front seat at the play, and can tell the unbiased truth, whereas those with a record to bolster or perhaps to conceal would hedge or quibble. My wife joins in this view; and I have found that when the women of a family combine against the nominal head thereof, the sooner he surrenders, the earlier he may be permitted to resume a quiet life. That is one particular, at least, in which the Black Star has made no change.

Another argument made by my women-folk, perhaps because they know how strongly it appeals to me, is that I view that great catastrophe with different eyes than do most folk. It had been the fashion

—starting in the Great War—to sneer at science. I know full well that science can be put to base uses; but I hold that science is the greatest servant of mankind, and that of all its enormous services, the greatest were rendered during the coming and going of the Black Star. Without the prevision and the power which science gave, without the weakening of superstition due to the spread of scientific knowledge, I fear the world today would be peopled only by the wrecks and dregs of broken nations, whereas we look out on a world bearing some scars that do not heal in a decade—but in the main, happy and prosperous.

IN the Year of the Star, as some folks want to date the new calendar, I was just under fifty years of age, and had been a widower for ten years. My daughter, aged twenty-four, was teaching in a Southern college; my son, three years younger, with a brand new diploma in mining engineering, was with a British firm in China; and I was lonesome without knowing it. I had graduated in medicine when only



Star

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

twenty-three, and practiced till eight years before, when a lucky investment relieved me of the task of earning daily bread. But daily work was still a necessity, and so I took up the idea of improving medicines, particularly of discovering, isolating and putting in convenient form the active chemical compounds of those serums which then were the chief reliance of the profession.

I lived alone in a house in one of the nearer suburbs, waited on, at the time this chronicle begins, by a man and his wife. Mrs. York cooked and managed the house; York helped her and took care of lawn and garden. They had been with me about a year, and we got on very well, though my daughter insisted that it was a case of the attraction of opposites. Mrs. York could have given *Huck Finn* pointers on the subject of signs and portents; she had at least five different dream-books which she consulted on the subject of her visions; and the amount of misinformation which she had managed to collect on several subjects was really remarkable. York was just about as superstitious as his wife, though he talked rather less about it.

ONE cold morning in early winter I was getting into my laboratory coat and apron, when my secretary entered, bringing a card labeled:

MR. CALVIN BAGGERY
Civil Engineer

"He is waiting," she said.

"Who is he, and what does he want?" I asked, crossly, for my search after an elusive substance in one of the serums was approaching a critical stage.

"I don't know," said the girl, grinning at my petulance. "But he's an awfully good-looker, and he says he has a letter for you."

"Show him in," I groaned. Visitors who come in the morning, especially if they bring letters of introduction, are a sure sign of a wasted day. The secretary grinned again before opening the door and ushering in the unwanted visitor.

"Doctor Lewis?" He slurred the "r" slightly, and I knew he was from the South. "I have a letter for you, sir, if you will permit me." Again there was the slur, too slight to be represented in type, though easy to notice.

I liked him at sight, in spite of the strong probability that he was messing up my day, and the slight shock that went through me when I recognized my daughter's writing on the letter he held out to me.

And my foreboding was soon justified. My independent offspring had written to say that she and "Cal" were engaged, and that she hoped I would approve her choice. I looked up in time to catch the twinkle in his eye, though his face was grave.

"So," I said, when I could get my breath, "you've come for the paternal

blessing! I suppose I ought to be glad that you didn't get married first and ask my opinion afterward."

"Oh, we wouldn't either of us want to do that, sir," he said.

I looked him over carefully. Six feet high, slim and wiry and straight as an Indian, with blue-gray eyes, high forehead, brown hair, yellow mustache and an honest, friendly look lighting his rather rugged features—my secretary was right, the fellow was an uncommonly good-looker. His age I put at about thirty; his calling was told on his card; and his face was a pretty good guarantee of at least moderate success. I held out my hand.

"All right, Calvin," I said. "If Helen has decided that we must be friends, we might as well begin. She's had her own way ever since her mother died, and it's come to be a habit."

"It seems to agree with her, sir," he answered, giving me a hearty grip.

"I met a man named Baggery over in France," I went on. "He belonged to an old South Carolina family. Probably you do, too?"

"Why, I reckon all families are about the same age, sir, if you could run the lines back on 'em," he returned. "But your friend probably wasn't one of my kin. We're mountain folk. I was born up by the Knobs, in Tennessee. A hill-billy, you might say, sir."

"Oh," I said, a little blankly, and then had the grace to add:

"So was Alvin Yorke."

"Thank you, sir," he said. "That's very nice of—" He stopped as the telephone rang.

"Hello, Doctor," came a voice which I recognized as belonging to Professor Truesdale, my friend at the North Shore observatory. "I want you to come out this evening at eight o'clock. This is important. May I look for you?"

"If you're sure it's important," I answered.

"The most important thing in the world," he answered. "I'll expect you, then, without fail. Eight o'clock. Good-by."

He hung up without waiting for my answer, which was like his usual cocksureness. I said as much to the young man before me, and he laughed, tolerantly.

"Perhaps he has some new information on the comet for you," he suggested. "I'll be going now, sir."

CHAPTER II

CAL dined with me that evening, and I found myself liking him better than ever. He had a deferential courtesy toward his seniors that I had thought lost in the rush and whirl of modern life; but there was no lack of decision in his views, and his questions showed a surprising range of reading.

"Just good luck, sir," he said, when I spoke of this. "I've got Latin books that belonged to my great-grandfather; but up in the mountains, folks kind o' lose touch with schools. My father couldn't read or write; my mother learned from me. I just had a piece of good fortune that didn't come to the rest."

"And that?" I asked. It took several questions to bring out the facts. When ten years old, and visiting the county seat with his people, he was badly wounded by a stray bullet in a shooting-scape. A visiting doctor, studying trachoma, managed to get the lad to a hospital, where he stayed for months—and cried when he had to leave. The nurses taught him to read, and he came out with an avid thirst for knowledge that is yet unquenched. I was still quizzing him when he reminded me of my engagement with Truesdale.

"Come with me," I said; and after some demur, he consented. As we got off at the entrance to the observatory grounds, we both looked up, unconsciously, at the comet.

"It should be a beauty when it comes nearer," said my companion. "Some people are still afraid of those things."

"The woman who cooked our dinner says it means a rising of the East against the West, whatever that means," I answered. "It's the chief subject of her dreams, these days. . . . That's Truesdale, sticking his head out on the balcony."

TRUESDALE is one of the world's four or five leading astronomers, but he has a series of mannerisms usually supposed to be the monopoly of opera stars and the more temperamental varieties of artists. He was small and frail as a child—he is just five feet above sea-level now; his parents were well to do, and he was spoiled outrageously. We were boys together, and I know. His upbringing would have ruined five men out of every six. Truesdale had too much sound sense to be ruined; but the treatment left him with an arrogant

habit, a love for weird shirts and atrocious neckties, and the perennial need of a haircut. He received us on the middle floor, just below the telescope-room. The huge pier that holds the telescopes takes up the center of this floor; but all around it runs a wide gallery, with balconies on every side to make it more spacious still. He frowned when I introduced Cal, for he does not like tall men, and came to the point at once.

"I shall ask you both to hold this interview in confidence. Doctor, how are your nerves?"

"Pretty good, for an old man," I returned. "Why?"

"I'm going to try 'em. Do you remember what I told you of the discovery of this comet?"

"A little," I answered, trying to bring back the recollection. He made an impatient gesture.

"No, you don't. It was found by that Canadian amateur, Douglas. Most astronomers think he gave the first position a little wrong, because it didn't fit in with the orbit computed from subsequent observations. I know how inaccurate amateurs often are, but it happens that I know Douglas, and he doesn't make mistakes. Now do you recall it?"

"Yes," I answered, testily. Truesdale waved aside my petulance with a small, graceful hand, crossed one pearl-gray spat over a little, check-trousered knee, and went on:

"It struck me that this comet would be worth watching, and I began to watch. That—and computations—have been my chief job ever since. I satisfied myself that some force other than the attraction of the sun is acting on the comet; and now I know what it is!"

"All right, Mr. Bones," I said as he made a rhetorical pause. "I'll bite. What is it?"

"It's a dark body, several times the mass of the earth, coming toward the sun at more than parabolic velocity; and though now only a little farther away than the orbit of Mars, it's still invisible. And it's going to raise Hades when it passes the earth," he added.

"But, man—a body no farther away than that, and big enough to affect the earth, must be visible," I protested.

"Not this one!" said Truesdale with proprietary pride. "I hope Arizona will see it before morning, but no one has seen

it yet. It must be incredibly dense," he went on, in a musing tone.

"Like that star Professor Eddington found a few years ago?" asked Cal. "The one so dense that a handful weighs a ton?"

"That's it," said Truesdale, with a glance of surprised respect. "In fact, this fellow must be denser still. Listen."

HE talked for half an hour, telling in language simplified for my benefit a story of uncanny insight, and of faith in his own mathematical prowess that approaches the sublime. Following the usual custom, the orbit of the then new comet was first computed as a parabola; Douglas' first observation, which chanced to be made some days earlier than any subsequent one, being set down as a slight error, forgivable in an amateur. Further observations showed that the comet was of the rare group that move in a hyperbola; but this orbit likewise assumed an error in the first known position. Truesdale was not satisfied. A weighty body between comet and sun, almost, but not quite, in line with the two, would explain the extremely slight deviation; but the most careful search with eye and photographic plate failed to disclose such a body. Then, with a flash of genius, he thought of the star that Eddington had measured in Canis Major, some years before, heavier than the sun, though smaller than the earth.

"I was sure that must be it," he said. "But some astronomers won't admit that Eddington's right, even yet, so I had to wait for proof. None of the outer planets were in position to be affected enough to supply the evidence; but there are two asteroids which revolve in a plane quite different from that of most planets. I computed that the body would come, near enough to affect them, and it has. But here's the puzzle: The best observers in the world are watching, have been for weeks. They've noted and measured the wobble of those asteroids under some influence; but even now, they can't get a sight of my dark body!"

"Excuse me, sir," said Cal, leaning forward eagerly, though his soft drawl did not vary. "I don't know enough about such matters even to be ignorant right, I reckon; but aint there some forms of matter out in the skies that seem to absorb light, instead of reflecting it? Seems like I've read of such."

"You've hit the only explanation I can think of," said Truesdale. "But here's something you may have overlooked. There is matter ten thousand times as dense as the earth; and this thing must be of that nature, or we would have seen it occult a star. But when matter is packed that way, it ought to make a perfect mirror, that would have been visible for months. The formations which absorb light—I fancy you're thinking of the Coal Sack—are probably thinner than any vacuum you could produce with an ordinary air-pump."

"I reckon there's quite a bit out there that we don't understand, yet," said Cal, jerking his thumb toward the skies. "You've done a wonderful thing, sir, if you don't mind my saying so. It sure will make folks take off their hats."

"If any folks are left to have hats," said Truesdale dryly.

I stared, catching the sense of the words, but unable to take in the threat of them. Cal's lips pursed in a soundless whistle. Truesdale went on:

"This old earth is due for a shake-up such as she probably hasn't had in a billion years, and I don't know how much of the human race will be left when the shaking is over. I compute this dark body to have at least six times the mass of the earth, and it's coming close. Say it passes a million and a half miles away. That will give us tides twelve times as high as those caused by the moon; every seaport not built on hills will be drowned out like a nest of field-mice in a flooded meadow. And that's not the worst!"

"For heaven's sake, what is the worst?" I asked.

"Earthquakes," he answered. "Such a pull on the earth's crust will make it bulge or crumple at every weak place. I'm afraid our cities are going to get a test such as they've never had before."

FOR minutes, there was silence in the room. I was trying to grasp the idea that all this havoc could be worked by a celestial intruder which even modern science could not see—and failing, miserably. A comet, now—what was it Byron said about some "wild colt of a comet, splitting a planet with its playful tail?" One could sense that. As if in answer to my confused thought, Cal spoke:

"If you please, sir, I'd like to ask two questions. This comet,"—another jerk of

his thumb at the skies,—“you say it's being dragged along after your Black Star, a couple of million miles or so behind. Looks to me like we stood a good chance to meet Mr. Comet, head on.”

"Very likely," said Truesdale, smiling. "That doesn't worry me much. It will mean a splendid meteoric shower, perhaps a pelting that will cause some casualties. If there are any masses like that which fell at Cañon Diablo in Arizona, they would make a lot of trouble if they landed in the streets; but the chance of that is pretty small. Man only covers a tiny part of the earth, after all, you know. What's the other question?"

"The heat of the sun, sir. Wont this Black Star speed that up enough to make trouble?"

"Certainly. You're probably seeing your last cold winter, even if you live past three score and ten. If the heat melts the polar ice-caps before the sun gets back to normal, the world may have a return of preglacial climate for centuries. That would be worth a temporary scorching."

HE was silent for a moment, and then, rising, turned to another angle of the case.

"Gentlemen, science is supposed to concern itself solely with truth, and not at all with expediency. In a case like this, I'm not above varying that formula. Every astronomer in the world knows something unusual is happening; but so far as I can tell, only myself and the few with whom I have communicated personally suspect the Black Star. The announcement rests with me—for a while, at any rate. Now, how much of this shall I tell the world tonight?"

"Heavens, I don't know!" I answered, as he faced me. "It's got to be told, and the sooner the better, so that we can make preparations to ride out the storm. But wont you want to wait till others confirm your calculations?"

"What do you think?" asked Truesdale, turning to Cal, whose presence he had resented less than two hours before.

"I think," said the young fellow, slowly, "that the man who's reached out into the sky an' caught this goblin by the tail doesn't need much confirming by other folks. It's a question of how much you can swear to yourself, and then of how much of that the world will understand. There's a heap to do, and the time must

be short. I'd say tell as much of what you're sure of as you think people can swallow without choking 'em, and do it quick!"

CHAPTER III

I LAY awake till dawn—not really thinking, but going round and round a treadmill of ideas that led nowhere. The imminence of the disaster worried me less than the unfairness of it. Man had just begun to attain real mastery of the planet; and now that planet was on the edge of ruin. Just when life was becoming secure against disease, it was assailed by matter out of the void. Just when nations were learning that war is suicidal folly, they were threatened by an enemy against which no arms could prevail. It seemed wanton, unjust, the prank of an impish destiny.

Cal knocked at my door as soon as he heard me stirring, and came in for a talk. His first question suited me perfectly.

"Doctor," he said, "what about Helen?"

"She's safer where she is," I answered—that being one problem that I had worked out in the restless hours. He nodded.

"My notion, too—though I aint certain she'll stay there." He grinned as he met my look, and I saw that he knew my plucky, loyal, self-willed girl as well as I did. "She may, if we both insist, though."

"You'll be going back at once, of course?"

"No," he said. "Things there are on the knees of the gods, like. There's plenty of folks to do whatever can be done, and if they wont do it, I couldn't help. But here—the big cities are going to be an awful problem, Doctor; and I'm an engineer, and I've had some experience handling men. I've got to stand by, if they'll let me. You're the one to go to Helen."

"Not me," I answered. "Chicago's been good enough for me to stick by the old town."

"I reckoned you'd say about that," he said. "Here are the papers."

Truesdale's cautious announcement was on the front pages of all three. It was even more conservative than the draft he read to us before we left. A dark body of highly concentrated matter was falling toward the sun. It would pass so close to

the earth that tidal disturbances of a serious nature were certain, and there might be even graver results. This dark body—Truesdale had adopted Cal's phrase, the "Black Star"—was pulling the comet in its train, though that, in itself, was no cause for alarm. Further details would be given as soon as the astronomers of the world had computed the path of the unwelcome visitor.

One paper printed the bare announcement, set off by "snappy" headlines. The other two had interviews with several prominent astronomers. Most of these savants were noncommittal, but the man in charge of Lick was less cautious. He wired:

Have not checked computations, but trust Truesdale. If he says look out for squalls, do it.

"The old boy'll appreciate that," I said. Cal grinned, wryly.

"Yes sir. He's got a right to be pleased. Look at what some of the other fellows say, sir."

I read on. Several politicians and business men had been interviewed likewise. The mayor, elected the year before on a platform of "hundred per cent Americanism," whatever that may be, declared that such reports were all nonsense. Everybody knew that comets weren't dangerous; and as for the Black Star, there wasn't any such thing. Stars were bright; everyone knew that, too. It was clear that he didn't know a nebula from a potato-bug, and he acted as if the whole business were just a conspiracy to annoy him.

THE governor, more cautious, said that he hadn't had time to look into the matter, implying that when he did, everything would be all right. One enterprising reporter reached the President, who listened to the account with keen interest, said frankly that he knew nothing of astronomy, but trusted the savants who did, and hoped the newspapers would keep him and the country supplied with solid facts, told simply enough to be understood.

"There's a real man," I remarked.

"He'll need to be," said Cal. "Read what the Boosters say, sir."

This was an organization of hot-air artists dubbed the Boosters' Club by the people, though they had a more high-sounding name on their letter-heads. They had played a noisy and perhaps important

part in the last municipal campaign, and now fancied that they owned the city hall. Several of them had joined in a statement that the mayor was entirely right, that the whole matter of talk of possible disaster was just a bid for newspaper publicity.

"Thank heaven they're not a sample of the real business world!" I remarked.

"Amen!" said Cal. "They'll make a lot of trouble for a while, though, before folks get interested enough to push 'em aside."

I could not work in my laboratory that morning, so we drove downtown together. Cal left, on a scouting trip, he said, agreeing to meet me at lunch. I went to a big radio-shop and ordered a complete sending outfit conformable to the new regulations put in at my house immediately, then to the telegraph office and wired money to Helen to do the same. If the time came when the wires were overloaded or out of commission, my little girl and I could still talk to each other.

CAL turned up nearly an hour late for lunch, saying that he had offered his services to a firm of engineers whose head he knew, but that the answer was not encouraging.

"From what they tell me, I reckon this fellow the mayor must be the original dried peanut, sir," he reported. "They say it's impossible to get an idea into his head that doesn't spell politics, an' I reckon that bunch of Boosters that backed him belong to the same class. Well, they'll get kicked out of the way when things get real serious. I've got news from Helen."

"That so?" I exclaimed. "You must have called her up."

"Sure," he nodded. "Well, sir, I never counted much on special providences before, but I'm strong for 'em now. The dean of women down there,—you've heard Helen speak of her, of course?—she's been in an auto accident an' has to go to a hospital for a month or six weeks, and nothing would do but Helen must take charge of Nightingale Hall for her. That makes it her duty to stick, you see, sir. Aint it bully?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, rejoicing because a poor woman has to go to the hospital," I rebuked him.

"Oh, she'll be all right," he answered with a grin. "Besides, you're tickled yourself, Doctor."

The afternoon papers, brought in as we finished our lunch, had important news.

One English astronomer and one at the new observatory in Arizona had seen the Black Star. The Englishman was first in point of time, but the Arizona man had the better observing conditions. The star was not absolutely black, but had a pale glimmer very difficult to detect. I forget how far ahead of the comet it was at that time; but both astronomers agreed with Truesdale that the splendid, long-tailed visitor whom millions noted each night was swayed by this insignificant blob of concentrated matter which even modern instruments could scarcely see.

"Like a tug pullin' a liner," said Cal.

THE weather had moderated, and I took Cal for a drive around the boulevards. We had switched off to one of the business streets for something when he suddenly asked me to stop, and opening the door, leaned out and called:

"Ransom! Hey! Ransom! Come over here!"

A tall negro on the other side of the street turned quickly, caught sight of Cal, and came at a trot. The two shook hands.

"Why, Misto Cal!" exclaimed the colored man. "What on earth ah yo' a-doin' up No'th, heah?"

"Just at present, I'm shakin' hands with an old scalawag that ought to be in jail," answered Cal. "Doctor Lewis, I want the privilege of introducin' an old friend of mine, Ransom Galilee. Ransom's the slyest old rascal, black or white, there is in Chicago, an' the best orator, too. He can talk rings round any spellbinder I ever heard. That's the way he keeps out of jail, I reckon, but I never knew him to go back on a friend."

"Misto Cal has to have his fun, Doctoh Lewis," said Ransom. He was really a fine-looking man, café-au-lait in color, with high features, full but not thick lips, and only a moderate kink to his hair and to the narrow hedge of beard, like that of an ancient Egyptian king, which he wore down the exact middle of his chin.

"What are you doin' here, Ransom?" demanded Cal.

"Why, Misto Cal, I've just secu'd a position with an insu'ance co'p'ration. I reckoned on tryin' that fo' a spell." He grinned in some embarrassment as Cal stared at him accusingly.

"Ransom, have you read about the Black Star?"

"Yes suh, that an' the comet. Tha's

what inspi'ed me to 'cept that position. They'll be a powe'ful sight o' folks that wants to get insu'ed 'bout now."

I joined in the laugh; so did Ransom. Cal got out of the car.

"Doctor," he said, "I wish you'd let me come home on the street-car. I've just got to have a talk with Ransom, an' convince him that he aint going into the insurance business at all."

That night at dinner, I asked Cal about Ransom Galilee.

"It's four years ago, sir," he said. "The firm I was workin' for then had got a bridge contract away from the gang that did most State business, and they were tryin' to put us in the discard. First they got the county officials to arrest our workers—they all were colored—on one excuse or another; but we went to the governor, and he stopped that. Then they got a conjure-worker, and he mighty nigh wrecked us, scared our workers with his yarns an' threats till they quit as fast as we could hire 'em. Course, the law can't handle a trick like that; but I'd heard of Ransom; he'd just finished some protracted meetings about twenty miles away, and made a big hit. I went to see him, sized him up, and gave him a hundred dollars to come and talk my boys back onto the job, and fifty dollars a week as long as they stayed. He did it, too; and he wouldn't sell out to the other side, though they offered him twice what we were paying. He's been in a lot o' shady deals; but when he gives you his word, he sticks."

"Hum!" I said. "I suppose you've hired him again, but what for?"

"To go out among the darkies here, and pacify 'em. He wanted to start a series of end-of-the-world meetings, but I wouldn't let him. Most of the negroes up here have too much schooling for that, I reckon."

"A good many of the whites haven't," I retorted.

CHAPTER IV

THERE followed a period of marking time, while the astronomers were completing their computations. Some features of this period astonished me—and for that matter, do still.

One was the fact that hardly anyone talked about the Star, while nearly everyone talked about the comet. In vain as-

tronomers, teachers, lecturers, clergymen pointed out that no comet had been discovered big enough to do the earth any particular harm, that if we encountered this one head on, the worst we were likely to experience was a pelting by a sort of scattered celestial gravel-bank, while more likely still, nothing would result but a brilliant meteoric shower. All this wise exhortation went for little. Only a few astronomers could see the Star; everyone could see the comet; and all the old brood of superstitions connected with these long-tailed visitors sprang to renewed life. One of the morning papers, started by a war-profiteering millionaire only a few years before, and building up an enormous circulation by out-yellowing the yellowest journalism previously known, ran a regular comet department, beginning on the first page, and consisting of rumor, guesswork, flat invention, and a recital of every fool notion on the subject that could be pieced together out of history. It was a disgusting performance; but in the newspaper phrase, "it went."

ANOTHER surprise to me was the outburst of fakery. I had read Buckle, of course, and knew that every public calamity, real or threatened, increases the hold of superstition; but I was not prepared for the eruption of charms, spells, forecasts and magic words which deluged the community. I have never been able to decide just how much the fakers believed in their own wares—enough to be good salesmen, at least. Most of them were grossly ignorant; but all knew and practiced one maxim from Shakespeare: "Put money in thy purse."

Yet as my friend Wilson, professor of history at the university, pointed out, there was a vast difference between these forms of superstition, and those shown in earlier ages on far less provocation. No one of any influence laid the peril to witchcraft. No one started a crusade to extirpate sinners whose wickedness had brought the world into this danger. I think there are three or four pretty clearly proved cases of human sacrifice in the United States during the passing of the Star, and probably several more which cannot be proved. In countries where scientific learning was less widely diffused, there were hundreds—many of them voluntary self-immolations to turn aside the wrath of heaven. If the Star had come in the days

when witch-hunting was a social passion, I shudder to think of the horrors that would have come with it.

All in all, however, the behavior of society was no vast comfort to me in those days, and I still recall the thrill of pleasure with which I read one morning a letter by a clubwoman, Mrs. Mabel Early, in which she urged the women's clubs to put aside all other activities, and organize to meet the crisis likely to be caused by the passing of the Star. I read her remarks aloud to Cal at the breakfast-table, and he nodded.

"She was one of the speakers at the City Club last night, and said about the same thing. Mighty fine talk, made a good impression, too."

THAT evening we were summoned to meet Truesdale at the observatory again, and he gave us disquieting news. The English astronomer who was the first to see the Black Star was likewise first to finish the computation of its path. It would pass between one and a half million and two million miles from the earth, ahead of our planet and to the north.

"Our computations agree as far as we've gone—I expect they'll be finished before morning," he said. "Private dispatches have been sent to the governments of the world, but the news won't be made public until it's checked by this observatory, the new one in Arizona, and the French or Austrians, whichever finish first . . . what is it, Nelson?" he asked, as a tall, shock-haired youngster of not more than twenty-five entered the room. "You haven't finished?"

"Yes, I have, sir. The Englishman's right, and the rough plot you made weeks ago isn't more than five per cent out of the way."

"SO!" The little man fairly radiated satisfaction. "We've got a man waiting at the radio for a code message. It's going to be fully as bad as I warned you that first night, for the Star is heavier than I computed it then. And that isn't all!"

"What's the rest, sir?" said Cal, as Truesdale gave a rhetorical pause.

"This comet isn't as thin as most of 'em," he answered. "It had a very perceptible effect of its own on those asteroids, and we're going to plow right through the head of it. The nucleus will pass to the north—which is a mighty good thing;

but unless I miss my guess farther than has happened yet, there'll be a fall of meteorites that won't stop with being a spectacle!"

"Have you any more calamities up your sleeve for the poor old earth?" I demanded. The telephone rang before he could answer, but he wriggled his nose at me as he picked up the receiver. He listened, making notes and replying only in monosyllables, for a couple of minutes; then he put down the phone and faced us.

"Marseilles agrees with England, and so does Arizona—the radios got in within two minutes of each other. So does Vienna—that came while he was talking. They've left it to me to release the public statement. I expect the newspaper men are waiting for me at Flamsteed Hall now. Shall I tell 'em about the comet too?"

"No!" I exclaimed, and was relieved to see Cal's nod of approval. "You're going to scare the patient enough, anyway. He needs all the encouragement he can get!"

CHAPTER V

CAL was not waiting for me when I came out the next morning. He was not in his room, either, and the servants had not seen him. I waited a while, reading the papers—we were taking all three now, but the *Gazette*, the superyellow sheet of which I have spoken, was missing. The announcement in the others was conservative to a fault—just a statement of the date, direction and distance of the passing of the Star, with a brief summary added that high tides and perhaps other serious disturbances were expected to follow. We learned later that this holding down of the news to the barest outline consistent with truth was at the request of the Federal authorities in Washington, and that all private use of the radio was stopped for hours, while governments and statesmen talked with each other through the ether, and tried to reach a uniform policy toward the coming crisis.

I was half through my belated breakfast when Cal came in, a droll light of mischief showing in his eyes.

"Good morning, Doctor," he said. "Sorry to run away, but I happened to be awake when the papers came, and went down and got 'em. The *Gazette* had something in that seemed important to me, so I ducked out to carry the case to folks

that know more about things in this burg than I do."

He handed me the crumpled paper, pointing to the front page. There, in a "box" surrounded by impressionistic representations of comets, was an announcement that the Boosters' Club would hold a mass-meeting that afternoon at two o'clock in Argonne Hall, at which Mayor Nesselbunk would speak, exposing the plot of terrorism which was driving innocent people into nervous prostration and interrupting business. It was all a conspiracy between false scientists and cunning men who were trying to seize public property; but the mayor, a true hundred-per-cent American, would tear off the lid, and show the conspirators to all.

"How does a man in his position manage to keep so ignorant?" I asked, throwing down the paper.

"Oh, I reckon he has a gift that way," returned Cal, grinning. "But it struck me a meeting of that kind might make a lot of trouble, if it come off without anything to puncture it. So I took this over to Hershey, that engineer friend of mine, and called him out of bed."

"Go on!" I commanded, as Cal stopped, chuckling.

"Not much need for me to go any place," he answered. "Hershey's done that. There's been a bunch of business men and engineers organizing quietly for a week or more. They aint ready to go into action yet; but Hershey stirred 'em up. If there's any big man in town that he hasn't called up on this business, I bet he's had somebody else do it; and there'll be a lot of 'em sitting on the platform. You're to be there, too, and they want you to bring Truesdale."

"I see," I said. "You think the presence of solid men who know something about the business will hold him down?"

"I thought it would. Hershey says no, but we'll have somebody there to answer him, and support that he wont dare suppress. He's just fool enough to have the cops throw out anybody that tried to speak without a pretty strong backing."

"It's incredible that anybody could be so asinine," I growled. Cal laughed.

"Well, sir, there's no kind of jackass that looks incredible to me. I've been so many kinds myself, and seen so many more, I just naturally figure there aint any limit to the styles."

I paid a perfunctory visit to the labora-

tory, ate an unsatisfactory luncheon at the club, and went to get Truesdale. Before two o'clock, we were sitting on the platform in Argonne Hall, Cal with us. Most of the platform chairs were held for members of the Boosters' Club, who came straggling in, the majority of them seeming uncertain of themselves, and wondering whether they were not on the wrong track. A few still showed the confidence of perfect ignorance. The rest of the seats were occupied by men of learning or substance or both; and looking out over the packed auditorium, I decided that the crowd, in spite of the auspices under which the meeting was called, was a better than representative one, and could be depended on to go right if it got a fair lead.

A little after two-thirty Mayor Nesselbunk appeared, ostentatiously guarded by bluecoats, though he was much more likely to choke on his own importance than to be injured by anyone else. The uniformed officers retired as soon as they had escorted the city's chief to his seat, but a number of plain-clothes men were hanging about. The meeting was called to order by the chairman of the Boosters, who uttered a few gushing words about the champion of the people, and sat down. Nesselbunk had been looking ill at ease; but he arose, threw back his hair with his favorite gesture, struck his usual attitude, and began to speak.

I DO not suppose that speech was any worse than some other campaign stuff to which I have listened; but it was made ghastly by the occasion. Out there in the sky, disaster for the earth and doom for thousands was rushing toward us. In a hundred cities, thoughtful men of all crafts and callings were consulting to see how best the crisis might be met. But here, in this hall, a petty windjammer, thrown into office almost by accident, was mouthing platitudes that would have been wearisome in an off-year congressional election. It was all nonsense to say that the earth was menaced by the Black Star. There was no such thing as a black star; stars were bright. If it were black, astronomers could not have discovered it. The whole thing was a wicked fake. They talked about a black star just to scare the people, to draw their attention away from the conspirators who were trying to entangle this glorious nation with foreign powers, and to throw away our priceless

constitutional heritage, and from those other conspirators who were seeking to get control of the people's wealth.

There had been a considerable burst of handclapping when Nesselbunk rose. As he proceeded, there was applause from city-hall employees, who had a half-holiday, and from members of the Boosters' organization. Even this grew fainter and fainter. Plainly, the audience was not with the speaker, though I could not observe things as closely as I wished. Truesdale, at my right, was fairly bobbing on his seat with excitement and fury; half a dozen times I pulled him back into his chair by main force; and the moment Nesselbunk stopped, the little astronomer was out from under my grip, fairly running to the front of the platform.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he called. "You have heard the most absurd speech ever made since our ancestors came down from the trees and learned to walk on their hind legs!" A roar of laughter swept the hall. The chairman vainly tried to gavel it down. Whether he signaled for help or not, I cannot say; but a burly plain-clothes man strode forward, caught Truesdale roughly by the collar, and yanked him back. The laughter changed to a shout of disapproval, everyone stood up; and a long, lean form with which I had grown familiar of late flashed past me and caught the plain-clothes man in a strangling grip.

"Drop it!" said Cal. The pistol which the officer was trying to draw clattered to the floor. "Now, vamoose!" The stocky form pivoted over Cal's hip, shot off the platform, and landed, beam end down, in the middle of the bass drum. Half a dozen city detectives rushed forward. Cal stooped with a lightning movement and snatched up the revolver. A silence that told of suspended breathing dropped over the great hall as he looked at the officers, who had halted in their tracks.

"I reckon maybe you fellows had better wait a spell," he drawled. A thunderous roar from the audience rubbed home the remark, and the plain-clothes men stepped back. Cal held up his hand for silence.

"Friends," he said, when he could be heard, "I aint going to make a speech. I'm the one living Southerner in captivity that don't know how. I'm just going to ask you to listen to a speech, by a man that knows what he's talking about. It'll be a change, anyway." He beckoned to

Truesdale, who came forward again. Cal waited till the cheering died down, then spoke again:

"Friends, I was in the observatory a while ago when Professor Truesdale told Doctor Lewis just what was coming. He made an announcement of part of it the next morning—and that's the first the world heard of the business. He was the first man on earth to figure this puzzle out, and he's called the turn every step of the way till now. I'm thinking it would be a good plan to listen to him."

He nodded, turned away, dropped the pistol on the chairman's desk and strode to the back of the stage, while Truesdale stood waiting for the applause to end.

CHAPTER VI

BY midnight the committee of public safety was organized and working. By morning it was in touch with similar organizations elsewhere, and with the State and Federal authorities; and within a week, it had taken over the real management of the city. Nesselbunk continued to draw his salary—for a time—but others did the work.

Morning papers said that the President had been in consultation with foreign capitals by radio and with experts of various sorts in Washington, and that other eminent men were hurrying toward the capital to aid in formulating plans. The astronomers, the President said, had done their part by giving warning; men of special knowledge in other lines must bear the brunt of meeting the coming peril. Geologists were coming to club their data, and to forecast, as well as might be, the probable occurrence of earthquakes. Topographers, especially those familiar with the seacoasts, were bringing their information together to prepare for the expected tides. Leading doctors and health officers were summoned to unite on measures for safe-guarding public health, architects to exchange facts on the safety of buildings, bankers to give their advice on financial measures. There were engineers, manufacturers, ship-owners, railway executives to carry out measures which the men of science recommended. There were newspaper-owners, too, to agree on lines of public education. In this gathering, I was told, the only dissenting voice was that of Plankton, owner of the *Gazette*. He was

silenced then—but as will be seen, broke loose later.

I was proud of my countrymen, those days, and the feeling never has left me. Our government, at once topheavy and loose of fiber, seems wholly unfitted to meet emergencies; but I do not think a country on earth was better served by its rulers than ours. Part of this good luck was due to the shrewd sense of our President, who, knowing well that Government bureaus could not attend to a twentieth part the tithe of what must be done, had the wit and courage to leave nearly everything to private initiative and local organization, and keep the Federal power mainly in reserve. But his wisdom would have gone for little had it not been for the ready energy, cheerful courage and endless resourcefulness of the people; while without the foreknowledge that science gave, no preparation would have been possible.

I do not mean that humanity suddenly became perfect while the Black Star went by. Far from it! There were cases of profiteering in both materials and labor, other cases of heartless selfishness, petty jealousy, callous indifference, blind fear. Vendors of charms, for example, did a rushing business. But in the main, the race showed up as it always does in an emergency, sound and brave, with a limitless capacity for sacrifice when rightly led.

The days that followed, as Cal said, were a cross between a picnic and a nightmare. My part was a very humble one; yet I worked longer hours than during the height of my practice; and Cal was busier still. There was a world of misdirected energy, but little idleness. Home guards were organized to insure order. Red Cross units were recruited and drilled in their duties. Volunteers trebled the strength of the Fire Department. Public utility companies installed innumerable cut-offs, and the city did the same, so that if water-pipes, gas-mains or wires were broken by the expected earthquakes, the affected district could be isolated with the least possible inconvenience. Inspectors, mainly working without pay, went through the city looking into the stability of buildings. In every hospital, ceiling-cloths of heavy canvas were stretched on strong supports to catch any plaster that might fall, while in the larger wards, these cloths were replaced by metal sheets.

I like to remember that the schools kept open all through this time. One could

hardly say that business was as usual, even there; but I doubt if the youngsters ever learned so much in the same length of time as while the Black Star was racing toward the sun. Nor would even the briefest account of this time be complete that failed to mention the services of the Boy Scouts. I am told that an official history of their organization during the Star period is to be issued this fall. It will need to be good to do them justice.

ON three points there was an element of controversy. The geologists agreed that every part of the earth was likely to be shaken by earthquakes; but most of them declared that the disturbances of this nature in the central valley would be mild.

The next dispute was whether the passing of the Star would cause tides in so small a body as the lakes. The real masters of the subject voted in the negative; but one brilliant, erratic amateur maintained the theory of lake tides most convincingly.

The third dispute was about the comet. Truesdale had taken another dive into the—to me—bottomless sea of mathematics, and come up with the statement that the comet was really much more massive than any previous visitor of the sort—heavy enough to cause enormous trouble. Other astronomers accepted his figures, but pointed out that probably most of the mass of the comet was concentrated in its nucleus, and since this would certainly pass north of the earth, there was little cause for alarm. The argument, though a hot one, was kept out of the newspapers, since all opposed any further alarming of the public.

The coast cities, of course, had a far more difficult problem of tides than our amateur Jonah predicted for us. All low-lying residences along the shore had to be evacuated in the dead of winter; and half of the millions of people to be moved did not want to go. A horse rushes back into a burning stable, not because he wants to be burned, but because his stall always before has been a place of rest and safety, and he turns to it instinctively when his little horizon is ablaze. A good many people showed the same reaction. They dreaded the comet—for that still held first place in the fear of the multitude; they believed most of the warnings which the newspapers dinned into their ears day after day—but why did they have to be dragged away from home? It was a piece of nat-

ural, pathetic unreason which cost more lives than anything else.

Other people, however, can tell of those things better than I; of the "Holiness" mania that worked such havoc in a small district of the middle South, of the inexplicable "Prophet" uprisings in Spain, and of the march on Washington by fanatics who proclaimed that a week of fasting and prayer by the entire nation would send Black Star and comet alike scurrying back to the depths of space from which they came.

MOST accounts speak of the pall of terror that hung over everyone during all this time of waiting. That is a mistake. It is physiologically impossible for anyone to remain terrified constantly for more than a few hours. Nature doesn't permit it; she either provides a respite in the shape of sleep, or throws a switch that makes the mind incapable of getting the full relish from its fears. There was terror enough, those days; but it came in spurts, devastating while they lasted, but short-lived. As for those of us who had responsible work, we felt fright little if at all. During our working hours we were too busy, and out of hours, too tired.

I talked to Helen every night on the radio. So did Cal. At first she insisted that we come to the little college town where she was marooned; then she began talking of how soon she could get away; and both her "menfolks" heaved a sigh of relief when the Government clamped the lid on all unnecessary traveling.

Cal and I did not see overmuch of each other, though he stayed at my house. I was working mainly with the Red Cross, while he was a priceless jack-of-all-trades, fitting in anywhere at a moment's notice. But one evening, early in the brief wait, I took him somewhere in the car, and coming back, we stopped to listen to a street preacher who was haranguing the crowd. The weather had turned cold again—there must have been twenty degrees of frost; but a tall, lean man stood bareheaded on an improvised platform, and five hundred people had halted in the icy streets to listen to his appeal:

"The heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat!" The majestic words were chanted in a high-pitched voice which somehow did not fail of impressiveness. "The day that the prophets foretold is at

hand, day of wrath and day of mourning! O ye of little faith, that having eyes, see not the flaming sword of God's justice in the skies, and having ears, hear not the very winds proclaim your doom! Do you think to divert from its course the cannonball of the skies, which He has hurled at a wicked world? Oh, repent, repent, while yet there is time! These men of science know just enough to know that doom is coming, but not how to meet it. They are wise at last—when their wisdom is foolishness. A few more days, and we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat! On which side shall we stand, with the sheep or with the goats, with the ransomed or with the lost? O brethren, sinful brethren, on your knees and pray for mercy!"

Not fifty persons in the crowd remained standing. I drove away, exclaiming wrathfully:

"He shouldn't be allowed to preach death and doom that way! It ought to be stopped!"

"No sir," said Cal, with that unfailing deference to age which made him so likable, even when his razor-edged mind was cutting the prejudices of age to shreds. "If you'll forgive me, Doctor, you're wrong. The folks this man really gets hold of, they won't be scared, no matter what happens; and I'm more afraid of panic than I am of the Black Star."

HE was right, of course, confound him; but I delayed the acknowledgment a minute or two, and he spoke again:

"I've got to see Ransom, Doctor. He's been right an' I've been wrong all this time, and I've got to tell him so. I must see him, and turn him loose on these world-end meetings of his. Ransom can give this fellow cards and spades, and beat him plumb to death on points."

We hunted up Ransom—it took hours; but when we found him, and Cal released him from his pledge and told him to go ahead on his own line, the colored man's face was jubilant, and his dialect broader than in any save moments of high excitement:

"Misto Cal, you's neveh goin' to be sorry fo' tellin' me that! You's goin' to heah about Ransom Galilee, yes, an' mothehs is goin' to heah about him, too! I'll have these folks so they'll stand hitched if the devil comes right at 'em, with a comet in one han' an' a Black Star in the other, yes suh! You listen—an' watch!"

CHAPTER VII

UP to two days before the Black Star was to come nearest, things were fairly quiet. Plankton, of the *Gazette*, was edging more and more sensationalism into his reports, and showing less and less disposition to listen to warnings. The fellow simply could not go straight. Ransom Galilee was making good on his boast. He was speaking half a dozen times every twenty-four hours, talking to white and black alike, filling the biggest halls, gathering audiences too huge for any building around him in the parks. Wherever he spoke, he left his hearers in a state of exaltation, tremulous, indeed, unstable and erratic; but for the moment lifted above fear. It was a noble service—which I understand as little as I do the mathematical magic which enabled Truesdale and his fellow-astronomers to render mankind still greater benefits. Some of Ransom's sermons are before me as I write. Seen in type, they seem strained or trifling or both; but thundered forth in a voice that could carry every shade of the orator's meaning to a crowd of fifteen thousand people in the open air, they had a truly hypnotic power.

The weather was mild—there had been a steady thaw since the day following our encounter with the street-preacher which induced Cal to turn Ransom loose. I had to go to one of the southwest suburbs to see an old friend who was sick, and since my sedan was out of business for the moment, I took the touring-car. Cal joined me *en route*, as per agreement at the breakfast-table. He looked up something for the committee while I was calling on my friend, and before ten o'clock, we had started back. Suddenly Cal gave an exclamation:

"That's queer! The 'L' trains are running west on both tracks!"

It was true, and the cars were packed with people. More and more trains came as we drove in, and all were jammed.

"Something's started a panic!" I exclaimed. Cal nodded grimly.

"I reckon it wont be hard to tell who started it," he returned. "I wanted to clap Plankton in jail a week ago."

We were well inside the city limits, and driving on a street which, though good, was not so full of traffic as the main avenue in that quarter. Now I swung to the left, heading for the boulevard. I drove some blocks in silence before Cal began to speak again:

"They grabbed the trains, I reckon, and made the motormen run 'em. I hope nobody's killed. Hear that noise! I wonder—"

I turned a corner, and Cal's words died on his lips. The boulevard was a short half-block away, and it was a living river, a torrent of humanity, pouring west. The sidewalks were black with people. Men and women of a dozen nationalities, some empty-handed, some clutching their most cherished possessions, were hurrying westward, bent on getting out of the city. Children of all ages, on foot or in arms, some clinging to the hands of their parents, some with no visible older guidance, added to the poignancy of the scene.

BUT if the sidewalks were a turmoil, the street was a nightmare. Every manner of vehicle filled the road from curb to curb, heading west, likewise. Limousines and flivvers and every grade between struggled for advantage, crashed, locked mudguards, tore loose, dodged, started, stopped, crawled or rushed on again. Trucks, obviously stolen for the occasion and loaded to the guards with frightened passengers, stormed honking through the press. A horse and light delivery wagon came along, making what poor speed it might. Behind it a big truck crowded a flivver clear up on the sidewalk, and bellowed for the right of way. The horse-driver did not turn aside—probably he could not. A man sprang up on the truck seat beside the driver, leveled an automatic, and fired at the horse. The animal leaped and plunged onto the sidewalk as the first bullet struck, then sank in the shafts at the second. The driver turned, cursing furiously, and the pistol spoke again. He doubled up, a look more of surprise than pain on his face, and an explosion sounded almost in my ear. The bully on the truck seat pitched headlong to the road.

"Sorry I waited so long," said Cal in his softest drawl. "Might have saved the horse. Reckon we'd better turn round, Doctor, and take a side-street before that gets filled, too."

I started to turn, and stopped as a little girl of five came staggering into our cross-street, squeezed out of the mob like a pit out of a cherry. Cal's eyes were fixed on the roadway, watching for more signs of gunplay, so I jumped down and went to the youngster. She was sobbing, and could not tell me her name, nor did any grown-up

come out of the throng to look for her. I handed her over to Cal, who got back into the car with her, saying reassuringly:

"Don't you cry, little gal. We'll just take you for a ride, and your mammy'll come and get you before you can say Jack Robinson with your mouth open. Try it!"

SHE stopped crying to stare. I backed, turned, retraced our course; but when I got to the first through street, halted again. That was filled, too, though not so densely as the boulevard. As I hesitated, a young man with an evil face jumped on the running-board and stuck a pistol in my ribs.

"Out of that, grandpa, and make it snappy," he commanded.

I started to obey, and out of the tail of my eye saw that two other men were threatening Cal in similar fashion, and that he was rising. He still talked encouragingly to the little girl as he uncoiled his length, and held her out toward the back of the car. "Let me put the kid in the tonneau," he pleaded.

"Nix!" said the crook to whom he spoke. "There's men want this boat. Take the brat and beat it!"

Cal struck so quickly that I barely caught the blur of the motion. One instant, he was holding the child in both arms. The next, he had dropped her, and before she had hit the bottom of the tonneau, he had wrenched aside the menacing pistol and grasped his own revolver. The villain on my side swerved his aim from me to interfere; but at that I took a hand. Two shots rang out together, then a third, then a fourth, and my brigand crumpled.

"All right," said Cal cheerfully. "One of 'em's only winged, but I reckon we wont stop for first aid. If you can edge into the mess, Doctor, we'll worm across. Lay quiet, honey," he added to the little girl. "Lay right down tight on the bottom. 'Taint anything to worry about, just Fourth of July, like; but I want you to keep out of the way of the sparklers."

WE edged into the mess, ran with it two blocks, and edged out on the other side, drove south two blocks, and at the next through street, halted for a different reason. A company of home guards, mounted on motorcycles, went by like the wind; but fast as they went, I recognized at their head the little professor of history

who had become a military man overnight—and was making good at it, too.

"That'll be about all of that chapter of Exodus, I reckon," said Cal.

We drove eastward, unmolested. Half a mile in that direction we encountered some guards, who told us that the panic had been caused by a wild story in the *Gazette*. A nonexistent geological expert had been quoted as saying that a rock fracture extended clear across Chicago, which would insure terrible earthquake losses. By a piece of good luck, word of this performance had been carried to the committee on public safety before any great number of the papers were in circulation; but one load of about a thousand had been distributed in the very district where the map on the front page showed the earthquake peril to be greatest. The flight which we had witnessed was the natural result.

"Plankton's going to get his, if I have to give it to him myself," said Cal quietly. The lieutenant of the guards who had told us the tale gave a short laugh.

"I fancy all that's been attended to by this time," he said. "You might drive past the *Gazette* and see."

We did. A beam had been thrust out of a window on the third floor, and from that beam swung what was left of August Plankton, profiteer and panic-breeder. It was the first and last time that I ever have approved of lynching.

CHAPTER VIII

CAL left me in the loop on one of his numerous errands, and I drove home alone with the child, who had recovered full use of her tongue. Her name, she said, was Mabel Early, and they used to live in California; but Papa died and Mamma came East. Mamma had gone to some meeting that day to do things for poor folks, leaving Mabel in charge of the maid, who took the youngster and went to visit some relatives. "Something there scared her just awful." Mabel was not very clear on the rest of the happenings, but they were easy to guess. Scared by the fearsome fake in the *Gazette* and perhaps even more by the terror around her, the maid started west with her charge, and the two became separated in the crush.

I got home to find an empty house. The Yorks were out. At first I supposed they

were on a pardonable news-hunting trip; but a note on the dining-room table told the story. It had been revealed to the woman in a dream that mine was a house of death, and she and her husband were "fleeing—" the unconscious humor of the spelling was worth a cook—while there was time.

There were bread and milk and eggs in the house, however, so Mabel and I had a passable lunch. I took her on my rounds that afternoon, and managed to bestow her so she got a nap during a committee-meeting. She was ready for me when it was over, chattering nineteen to the dozen. We took dinner at a restaurant and went home. Twice a day for a week, now, an hour and a certain wave-length had been set aside for broadcasting news of lost persons, and it was probable that Mabel's case would be reported in the seven o'clock series. I settled the child on the thickest rug with a picture-book and blocks bought on the way home, tuned in on the "Lost, strayed or stolen" length, and waited. The first announcement concerned a man whom I had seen at the hospital. A dozen followed, of which I had no knowledge, and then:

"Mabel Early, five years old, brown eyes, brown hair, when last seen wore a gray cloak and pink dress, with brown beads around her neck. Has been living with her mother at the Deptford Hotel, and is supposed to have been taken to the West Side by the maid while Mrs. Early was engaged at the central headquarters of the women's clubs."

I reached for the telephone, called up the appointed number, told where Mabel could be found, and sat waiting again, thinking how oddly pleasant it was to have a child in the house once more. A little later the doorbell rang. I supposed one of my co-workers had come in reference to a point not settled at the afternoon conference; but it was Cal, with Mabel's mother. They had happened to be in the same room when the announcement and my reply came, and he had volunteered to bring her.

"Good thing the kid got out, maybe," he said while we stood in the hall a minute to let mother and child find themselves after finding each other. "Two children killed there in an elevator accident today."

Hearing that, of course I insisted that Mrs. Early make her home with us until what Cal called the "ruckus" was over, and after some demur she consented.

BREAKFAST was a communal affair next morning, and we all went out together. All traces of active disorder in the city had vanished. Everyone was apprehensive—a few were badly frightened; but there was no more effort to capitalize their terror. That yellow publisher, swinging from his own window, was a strong deterrent to such abominable action. No other editors in the city needed the warning; but it was not wholly lost on the host of street speakers that had sprung up like Jonah's gourd. Some of these men were simply messengers of courage, telling the people that tremendous as was the portent, it would not wreck the earth unless men participated in the wreckage. Some were evangelists, using the excitement of the moment as a means of getting across their various "messages;" and the better ones of these, as Cal had pointed out, were banishing fear likewise. The Committee of Public Safety could not say enough good things about Ransom Galilee. Some speakers were mere fool fanatics—I actually heard one blather-skite in Bughouse Square trying to link up the approaching peril with economic determinism and the sins of a capitalist régime. But none preached panic. Most of them—thank heaven—didn't want to, and the others knew that it wasn't safe.

IT was the last day before the first grand test of our preparations would come, and the activity was feverish. Men of science were issuing instructions, and men of action were turning them into facts. There was no more arguing to get folks out of unsafe buildings; invalids were carried out, and tear-gas bombs got rid of the rest. Some whole districts were cleared in this fashion. No one was to use gas after six o'clock next morning until assured by radio that the worst earthquake peril was past. Careful instructions had been issued on the use of fire, and companies stationed at various danger points and in all hospitals and barracks to guard against accidental blazes. Corps of trained workers manned the new cut-offs, ready to shut gas, current or water from any district where broken connections should make these services a peril. People were given a final notice to provide themselves with cold food and candles; and outside the business districts, to make for the open street when the radio gave warning. In the business districts, particularly in the loop, the warning was reversed; there folks were to get off the streets and into

the newer buildings, particularly the steel skyscrapers.

The weather, as I have said, continued mild, and observers estimated that more than a hundred thousand people spent the night in streets, parks and open squares. They had to get along with improvised shelters or none, since the Government had commandeered every tent in the country for use along the coasts, where vast populations had to be moved out of the reach of tides. Radios from the East described everyone in the shore cities as working all night. We were more fortunate. I came in at nine o'clock, dog tired but with everything done that could be done, to find that Mrs. Early had a dinner ready for me. Mabel, of course, was in bed. Cal got home long after midnight.

AT five o'clock I was up again; Mrs. Early joined me a few minutes later, suggesting that we let "the children" sleep a little longer. Cal was with us in half an hour, however, wire drawn but looking as if he had indefinite reserves still stored in his long, lean frame; and while we were eating breakfast, cooked the night before and kept warm in a thermos container, Mabel came out in her nightgown. She climbed on my knee, confiding in me that she liked having a papa around once more, even if he did have white hair. Cal laughed mischievously, and Mrs. Early blushed.

Only a few places near the lake were accounted safe, but that near the great museum was one, and thither we drove as soon as breakfast was over. Engineers had pronounced the building safe, too, especially since wire netting and cloth had been strung to catch any broken skylights. A radio megaphone had been set up on the north portico. The lower lying portions of Grant Park had been cleared, and all works that could be injured by water removed from the Art Institute. At the time, this seemed a mere excess of precaution. When we reached the museum, several thousand persons were gathered already, and more kept coming. Cal had dropped off to join his group of home guards. Mrs. Early, Mabel and myself climbed on the then vacant pedestal where now stands Petrie's statue of the Neanderthals. There we were joined in a few minutes by several others, including Walter Hermiston, the anthropologist.

"Going to be well out of harm's way, aren't you?" he asked.

"I'm going to be where I can see something," I retorted.

"Right," he answered. "If this Black Star Samson is going to shake down the city, this is a first-class place to see him do it. I don't expect half the trouble that's been predicted, though."

THE first radio announcements were little more than summaries of what we had heard the night before, or read in the morning papers. Slight earthquake shocks were reported from Japan, heavier ones from Burma and the west coast of South America, Vesuvius active, Stromboli active, Pelee rumbling, lava coming from a gap in the side of Mauna Loa. A little after ten o'clock came a more significant bit of news.

"Cables to Hawaii and Japan have ceased to work. Unprecedented tides reported from California coast. Severe earthquake shocks felt in City of Mexico and in Jamaica."

"Thank heaven we don't have to fret about tides!" exclaimed Hermiston. "Of course, a severe earthquake under the lake might play havoc, but I don't think that's very likely."

"Anything's likely," returned Mrs. Early. The megaphone began again:

"Don't lose your wits! That doubles your dangers and cuts your chances in two. Billions of people have lived through earthquakes, and so can you! Keep your head cool and your feet warm!"

The little group on the pedestal exchanged grins, some of them rather sickly ones. The announcer went on broadcasting the news. Aetna was quivering and smoking, and a severe earthquake was reported from Iceland, where Skaptar Jokul was spouting fire. Light shocks had been felt in England and Labrador. Tear-gas bombs had been used to drive a crowd of fanatics away from the beach at Atlantic City, where they had marched to hold a meeting at the very edge of the water, and demonstrate the power of "holiness" over tidal waves.

"Pity they didn't let 'em stay there!" said Hermiston, who has small charity for emotional disturbances.

NO one answered; the megaphone, too, was still for a moment. Then the concrete pedestal under our feet gave an odd shiver, lurched drunkenly to the north, reeled back in the opposite direction, then

shook itself like a dog coming out of the water. A chorus of screams came from the crowd. I picked myself up from where I had fallen, saw that my companions were all right, and looked around. The columns of the great portico near were all standing, though the drums of some were displaced. The great buildings lining the west side of the boulevard stood firmly, though the gaping windows explained the crashing sounds we had heard, and the cornice of one had fallen to the sidewalk.

"The engineers were right," I muttered. Some one clutched my shoulder, screaming: "The lake! Look at the lake!"

In all that I have read of so-called tidal waves, the water receded from the shore before rushing in again. Here there was nothing of the sort. Out on the lake, so far out that at first I could not be sure I saw it, appeared a shoulder, a hump. It spread to right and left, coming nearer the while, and became a raised line. On toward us it rushed at express-train speed, and another wild shriek went up as we saw that it was a rolling wall of water, I dare not say how high.

"My God!" A low-pitched voice of odd carrying power seemed to thrust aside the screeching terrors. "It'll drown the city!"

"The breakwater'll stop it!" said another.

SOME panic-stricken fool scrambling to the pedestal nearly pushed Mrs. Early off. When I could look back from attending to him, the breakwater had disappeared. The rolling wall had not broken, it hardly seemed to have noticed the barrier. There was no curling crest, as on an ordinary wave; just a solid green mass, topped here and there by boats, floating timbers and cakes of ice, rushing like Fate toward the shore. There was a crash which we realized was the smashing of the breakwater, and following so closely as to be like a greater echo came another crash as the wave struck the shore. A spray of water shot a hundred feet into the air.

"We're all right!" came an encouraging sound. The crowd started to cheer, and stopped, dead. The curtain of spray had dropped, and behind it came another rolling wall, larger than the first.

"Rank behind rank, in surges bright," quoted Mrs. Early, holding Mabel high in her arms. This time the spray dashed in our faces and water swirled in sheets around the base of the pedestal. The

crowd began a wild scramble up the museum steps.

CHAPTER IX

I COUNTED four great waves, of which the last was the highest. In reality there was a fifth, somewhat smaller than the others, which was masked by the fourth and by the gale of wind which swept down suddenly from the west. I squattered through water knee-deep to get to the museum, where I worked for hours setting broken bones and dressing wounds, mostly caused when the victims were flung against something by the water. Finished at that station, I reported for duty at the nearest hospital. It was midnight before we could stop. Our little household drove home together, Mrs. Early carrying the sleeping Mabel on her lap. Most of the street lights were out, and the night was cloudy; but everything showed as plainly as in full moonlight. It was the sheen of the giant comet, filtering through the clouds.

"And tomorrow night we meet up with that gentleman," remarked Cal. "Well, whatever may be lacking in my young life, it aint variety."

Earth-tremors still continued, though nearly all damage was done in the first five minutes. It was rather less than I had expected. Windows were broken and plaster cracked everywhere, of course; several hundred buildings were shaken down, and more were unroofed by the gale. But so accurate were the estimates of architects and engineers that only one building in which people were allowed to remain collapsed, and the steel skyscrapers justified the pride of their builders. Here and there one lost a section of cornice or a bit of inclosing wall; but the structure invariably stood fast. The same condition was reported from other cities. When I was a boy, it was thought and taught that the "old builders" were the real masters of construction. No one has ventured such nonsense since the passing of the Star. In that emergency the "new builders" proved their supremacy, once for all.

The chief havoc was caused by water. Scientists had made allowance for upheavals under the lake, but the actual upthrust belittled all forecasts. The direct onset swept even the beaches considered safe; nor was that all: the terrific waves entered the river, made themselves felt as

far as Lockport, and overflowed wherever the banks were even moderately low. The property damage from this source never has been estimated.

I DID not even glance at the evening papers. Those of next morning presented such a sheaf of news as the world never read before. The usual staples of the daily press were missing—no society, no sports, no financial news, no divorces, no politics, almost no crime. One might have supposed the lightless condition of the city an invitation to crime; but apparently the underworld thought it had better economize in sin until there was more assurance of living to enjoy the loot. For the comet was still to come, and in spite of all that science could say, the world at large dreaded the comet more than the Star.

But if ordinary news were absent, tales of the great catastrophe through which the world was passing more than filled the gap. Earth-tremors seemed to have occurred everywhere. Terrific gales were reported from most localities, and in the prairie States these did more harm than the temblors. The Panama Canal was out of commission—everyone had expected that; but the report that the entire isthmus had sunk some twenty feet came as a surprise. Land at the mouth of the Colorado had sunk, likewise, and the Gulf of California was pouring into its ancient bed of the Salton Sea. Most cities had come through the shocks fairly well, though Washington had suffered severely, and Charleston and Savannah were pretty well wrecked by earthquakes before being flooded by the tides. Almost no lives had been lost, in those places, however. Havana had suffered the worst quake in its history. The City of Mexico was half in ruins. Collapse of buildings was reported from every capital in Europe, and part of the dome of St. Sophia had fallen. The newer buildings at Tokio had stood the strain well.

All this news came by radio, for only one Atlantic cable was working. With them came a curious tale that the Sahara was flooded. Knowing that most of the great desert was a plateau, I dismissed the story as a fake, without once guessing the considerable measure of truth in it.

One note ran through all dispatches from coast communities. Always, it was the tides that had caused greatest havoc. The astronomers had figured what the tides would be; but the general public and the

officials could not grasp the full measure of the menace until it was upon them. Small wonder in that. The bore that rushed up the Hudson carried devastation almost to Albany. That which ascended the St. Lawrence stopped only at the rapids. All the lower parts of Long Island and the entire eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia were under water at one time; nor do I think Florida was much better off.

CHAPTER X

I CALLED at two hospitals that morning, though only expected to report at one, and found the situation well in hand. Almost all injuries had been found and cared for the night before; they required little or nothing just now, and the general health was good. Minor ailments disappear in times of high excitement. The human engine gets to running at such a pace that small knocks and squeaks are not noticed; but for my part, I believe there is a real curative effect. At such times we get down to the primitive facts of life, to the conditions which our nervous systems were developed to meet; and whether we like to admit it or not, the result often is good for us.

The gales which came with the Star died down during the day. High tides were still reported from all ports, though nothing like the terrific walls of water that rolled inland as the Star passed. Ships at sea had fared well. The people of coast cities were coming back to their homes. There was hot fighting in Spain between the Government troops and the followers of the Prophet. The Australian government had sent a ship to search for and report upon the alleged new island.

Cal was away all day, supervising some clean-up work. He came to dinner with the news that current had been restored to all the city, and gas and water to most of it. We listened to the radio while eating, and found one item particularly interesting:

"Reports of flooding the Sahara prove to be partially correct. The Mediterranean is pouring through a mile-wide channel into region long known to be below sea-level."

"If they'd flood enough of that danged sand-lot, it would be worth while," said Cal. "I'm tickled over this Salton Sea business; it gives Uncle Sam a port on the Gulf of California at last. I wonder

if the Dead Sea story isn't true, too; you know it would take only a little drop to let in either the Red Sea or the Mediterranean."

"Very likely," I assented. "It seems odd that even a catastrophe like this should have its good points."

"The old proverb," said Mrs. Early. Mabel spoke from the window, where cracked panes were held together by surgeon's adhesive tape, and those smashed too badly for such repair had been replaced by paper.

"The comet's awful big tonight," she said.

Her mother and I went to the window and stood looking out, each holding a hand of the youngster, while Cal slipped out to the garage and brought around the car.

MAKING two detours for broken pavements, we drove to the observatory. A good many people seemed headed in the same direction, and when we came to the little park, of which the astronomical buildings occupied the southeast corner, both sides of the street were lined with vehicles, and a crowd of thousands was gathered around the bandstand.

"What in Sam Hill do they mean by holding open-air meetings tonight?" demanded Cal. He went over to the crowd, and soon came back with information.

"It's Ransom," he said. "They'd planned a gathering in the gym, and the crowd came so thick they adjourned to this place. I don't like it, but I don't believe the danger is big enough to warrant chasing them out. And they won't go without chasing," he added.

"They're not likely to get hurt," said Truesdale. "I hope, gentlemen, you appreciate the spectacle you're going to see."

"It's quite a spectacle now," returned Cal.

It was the most amazing sight that human eyes ever looked on. At sunset, the head of the comet was several times larger than the full moon, and it grew, hour by hour, as it came nearer. It was a gigantic, round disk, unevenly bright; parts of it more brilliant than the moon, parts giving off only a thin, ghostly radiance. The nucleus, far to the north, was brightest of all, and certainly looked as solid as the very earth, whatever the facts of the case as mathematicians computed them. The edge of the disk was irregular, and all

around it, the foreshortened tail, streaming back from the sun, appeared like a huge halo. And still it grew, and grew, till it filled the sky; and I shivered with something other than cold as I watched.

"Like looking into the mouth of a gun," said Cal, "—a gun big enough to blow the world to bits. They say it's only loaded with wadding, though. I most wish—"

He broke off without finishing his sentence, but I knew he was thinking of Helen.

"Oughtn't we to see the earth's shadow on the comet?" I asked Truesdale.

"You can if you look closely," he answered. "It doesn't make a sharp line. A comet is partly self-luminous, anyway."

We went out on the balcony. The crowd around the bandstand was singing a hymn, Ransom's marvelous baritone leading. The air was filled with a silvery, greenish light by which one could read fine print. I noticed now that, save for the nucleus, none of the brighter parts of the comet seemed to have sharp, definite edges; and shining through the luminous haze were stars.

"The stars of hope," said Truesdale, with more poetry than I had given him credit for. "That shows how thin the fear-some-looking thing really is. But I'm glad that nucleus is passing by on the other side, though there'll be a few casualties, anyway. . . . Ah!"

HALFWAY up the northern horizon burst forth a series of brilliant sparks, radiating in all directions. The sparkling area widened and spread. For a minute it was merely a more brilliant meteoric shower than many which I had seen on August or November nights, but even as I drew a breath of relief at the familiar aspect, a fire-ball blazed out overhead. It looked larger than my fist; another appeared beside it; in a few minutes, scores were visible.

"Hear 'em!" cried Truesdale; for the air was filled with a hissing, crackling sound, cut through now and then by sharp reports. The little astronomer was fairly dancing with excitement, and he acted as though he were the producer of the show. The fire-balls grew thicker and larger, but seemed to be dissolved and lost in the protecting blanket of air, until one, leaving a train of smoke behind it, came down close to the packed multitude in the field. There was a scream, covered instantly by the stentorian voice of the black preacher as he called for courage, and the groaning

"amen's" of the crowd. An instant later something struck the concrete walk below us, and flying particles stung my hand.

"They seem to be getting the range," said Cal. He vaulted over the balcony railing and trotted out toward the gathering on the lawn.

"Oh, Ransom!" he shouted in an interval of comparative silence. "If you'll take your people back toward the lake there, and talk to 'em from that statue, they'll be partly protected by the trees!"

"All right, Misto Cal! Come, my brethren. We takes up our march, not from fear but from wisdom. We do not tempt Providence, but we do not flee. De glory of de Lawd shone roundabout. Dey saw de glory, an' was sore afeared. But be not afeared, my brethren! We are in de hollow of His hand—"

The magnificent voice rolled on, and the crowd yielded to its spell, following at a steady pace as Ransom led them to the woods of which Cal had spoken. The young man rejoined us on the balcony.

THE celestial bombardment grew heavier. The fiery sparks were thick as snowflakes in a blizzard. Most of these were reduced to vapor by air friction while still far above the earth; but the larger ones came through. Something which none of us saw struck near by with force enough to shake the building. A white-hot something that looked as large as a man's body crashed in the road a hundred yards away. A loud explosion from the lake-side attracted our attention, and we went to the east side of the building. Several watchers there greeted us with awe.

"A fire-ball big as a skyscraper hit the lake!" they exclaimed.

"Plenty of room for it out there," said Cal dryly. "Fine view, aint it, Doctor?"

There had been a strong wind all day; the lake was rough; and the tossing waves, lit by that greenish, unearthly glare, looked like the ocean of a nightmare. On that side, too, the sky was painted with unnumbered sparks, and while we watched, a meteorite that looked larger than my head vanished in the water with a boiling splash and a sharp report.

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Mrs. Early.

High up in the sky toward the northeast, a brilliant star flamed into view. In a moment it turned from a star to a small moon, then to a terribly large one. Around it crackled and blazed a host of lesser

particles, but only for a few moments; and by the time the huge meteor was directly overhead, it seemed to have no companions. It hurtled on, leaving a train of luminous smoke behind it, and the roar of its passing was like that of a train.

"Bigger'n a house!" breathed Cal.

"Rather bigger," said Truesdale sarcastically. "From five hundred feet to possibly five thousand in diameter. Hope it lands in a field."

It vanished. Truesdale stood with eyes glued to his watch. A low, rumbling jar came back to us, the shock transmitted through the earth. Then followed a loud crash, muffled by distance. Truesdale nodded.

"About twenty miles," he said, making a note on his pad. "I must see that tomorrow."

"Hope you have the chance," drawled Cal. "Reckon you will, though. This appears to be a case of great cry an' little wool, as the devil said when he sheared the hawg."

Mrs. Early laughed at the old-fashioned saying, and went in to look at Mabel, who was sleeping on two chairs in the basement, with my overcoat for a mattress and her mother's cloak for a blanket. The crackle of celestial musketry continued, punctuated now and then by heavier explosions or by human outcries. The latter were less frequent. "Human beings can get used to anything," I muttered, and started through the building to the balcony on the other side. I had gone about three steps when there came a shriek, a loud, crackling report, and I was thrown headlong.

CHAPTER XI

I MUST have been stunned, though only for a few seconds. I sat up, my head spinning from the thump, and stared around in pitch darkness. Everything was black, and for the moment everything was still, as if I had suddenly been transported to a great cellar, yards underground. Then I heard a sharp-drawn breath, a scraping sound, and then Cal's voice:

"Doctor! Doctor Lewis! Dad!"

"Here!" I answered shakily, and struggled to my feet. "Thank God!" exclaimed Cal. I heard him step; a round beam of light came through the gloom, and from another direction sounded a groan that roused me to full consciousness.

"Mrs. Early! Mabel!" I shouted.

"Here! All safe!" came the reply from the basement. "What's happened?"

I took the stairs at a faster pace than is usual for men of my age, Cal beside me with his flashlight. Mrs. Early was stooped over the still sleeping child, and six or seven persons who had drifted into the laboratory during the display stood or sat near. No injuries were to be seen among them, and their chorus of questions recalled me to my duty. Cal and I ran back upstairs, and he pulled some candles from his pocket as he went. He lighted two, and we looked round in the dim glimmer. The north windows and door of this mezzanine floor were smashed in, and great drifts of earth extended more than half-way across the room. Half-buried in these dirt-banks were four persons, three men and a woman, all with heads out; and from under another drift projected a pair of thin legs, evidently Truesdale's.

"QUICK!" cried Cal, grasping the knees and giving a heave. Out came the little astronomer, unconscious but alive, his face black with dirt, save where a cut was trickling red. I felt him over hastily.

"No bones broken, I guess," I reported, and we turned to the others. One of these had a broken leg. Groans began to come from the direction of the largest dirt-bank. Cal fairly dived at it, pawing away the earth with his hands until he came to the top of a wrecked table, with three persons cowering under it. A heave of dirt at a corner of the room turned our efforts in that direction, and we dragged out a woman, still conscious, laid her on the floor to get her breath, and looked round for more.

"All here, I reckon," said Cal. "If anyone was caught on the balcony—good night! Telescope floor, now, and everybody that can stand lend a hand."

He raced up the winding iron stairs, the rest of us following. The entrance to the telescope-room was closed by double doors, to shut out all gleams of light. The outer one, fortunately, was open; the inner was closed, and the building had tilted so that the door was jammed. For the first time I noticed that Cal was carrying a leg of the wrecked table from the room below. He swung it with a mighty heave while I held the flashlight, and a panel shivered. With more blows and kicks, he knocked out another panel and the cross stile, and

we crawled into the telescope-room. The dome slanted drunkenly; a big boulder had rolled clear across the floor; and following through the hole it had made, as well as through the slit for the telescopes, had come cubic yards of earth. Edwards, the lanky assistant, was sitting up, rubbing his head, while his legs were still buried in the dirt bank.

"Anybody else up here?" demanded Cal.

"F-four of us," said Edwards faintly. In a moment we found them, all alive though only one was conscious.

"W-what's happened?" gasped Edwards, as we helped him to his feet, and I tucked his left arm inside his suspenders to ease his broken collar bone until there should be time to set it.

"Big meteorite must have struck close to the observatory," returned Cal. "Seems to have buried the works." He was stooping to the eyepiece of the smaller telescope as he spoke. "How do you open the breach of these things?" he asked.

"We'll smother! Buried alive!" said one of the men who had followed from the room below. Cal waved him imperiously to silence and repeated his question. Edwards staggered over and showed the way. The eyepiece was swung aside, the tube opened. Cal dropped on one knee, took out his long barreled revolver, aimed carefully up the tube, and fired. Like an echo to the deafening explosion I heard the tinkle of glass.

"That'll stop the smothering," said Cal. "We can't be buried so very deep. I can see the sky, and the meteors streaking across it. All right, Doctor—we'll take care of the wounded now, and then dig ourselves out."

WE prospected in the dirt on the mezzanine floor again, found two men alive, one without a scratch, and one poor fellow, half in from the balcony, with a broken neck. We adjourned to the basement, where there was running water, and proceeded to patch up the injured as best we might. Truesdale had recovered consciousness; he swore at me continuously with the easy familiarity of a boyhood friend, all the time I was sewing up his forehead, and when I had finished, sat staring into my face.

"What is it?" I asked, expecting either another cussing or an apology for the one received. The little man spoke in his most arrogant manner:

"After this demonstration, I do not see how anyone can doubt the meteoric origin of the craters of the moon!"

The women laughed hysterically; Mabel, who had waked while we were upstairs, looked round in wondering gravity at those queer grown-ups who giggled under circumstances that even a child could see were serious; then, holding her mother with one hand, reached over and patted me with the other.

"It's all right while you're both here," she said.

"Right you are, kid," said Cal. A hoarse call from the telescope floor diverted attention from our blushes:

"Rescue! Rescue coming! We'll be out in a minute! We're all right!"

CHAPTER XII

WE were all right; personally, I felt like a colt; but it was nearer an hour than a minute before we were safely out of the observatory. On the north side of the building, taking in most of the ground from which Cal had "shooed" the crowd the night before, was a circular crater fifty or sixty feet deep, and about three hundred feet across, with a little cone-shaped nipple rising in the center, exactly like the craters on the moon. All around, the solid earth had splashed like thick mud, and lay sloping in all directions away from the crater rim. It was this outflung earth which had buried the observatory. Well below the bottom of the crater, as we afterward found, lay the meteorite which had caused the disturbance: a solid mass of iron with a slight alloy of nickel, ninety feet in diameter, with encircling fragments that must have brought its original cross-section to more than a hundred feet. Two persons were killed and fourteen hurt when this solid shot from the skies found its mark.

Almost as we crawled, one by one, through the mud tunnel to outer air, the last meteorite known to have fallen in this district cracked a pavement some four miles away. For seven hours the earth had plowed its way through the head of the great comet. The first meteor flashes came at eight minutes before ten in the evening; the first meteorite to reach the earth in our neighborhood came nine minutes later; the last one, mentioned above, dropped at four minutes before five. The shooting stars continued till dawn; but after the

time given, none of the fragments were large enough to get through the protecting curtain of air.

In those seven hours over four thousand meteorites are known to have fallen in the city and its suburbs. Probably the real number was greater still, though most of those which escaped notice must have been of small size. Nineteen persons were killed, either directly by the falling masses, or by the earth-spray flung out at their impact. The total number of persons injured was about two hundred.

Our car was still standing across the road, not even scratched. After a short wait I started to take Truesdale to his home; but he demanded to be carried instead to another observatory, and had his way. We reached it just before sunrise. He swept aside all inquiries after his health and experiences, and asked to look at the Black Star. After a few minutes at the eyepiece, he slid away, and motioned me to take his place; and for the first time I saw the cause of all the trouble; a tiny black blob against the red of the morning sky, a drop of ink spilled from some giant's pen. I felt cheated as I stepped back. It seemed humiliating that humanity had been knocked about so by that insignificant thing. I suppose a big engine that has been derailed by a fifty-pound pig might feel much the same.

WE left the little man there with his colleagues and drove home through the frosty morning. Somehow I expected to see the house bearing scars of battle; but it showed not a sign, though afterward we found an iron meteorite weighing about six pounds in the earth of the garden. After a hasty breakfast I went to the radio. We had been unable to use it the night before, though it worked well enough while the Black Star was rushing past, and scientists are still wrangling about the cause of this freakish behavior. I tuned in, found things working once more, waited till the hour at which Helen was to expect me if we had missed our evening exchange, and called. She answered at once. They had had a magnificent meteoric display, with only a few minor casualties, a stampede of frightened cattle, and a couple of fires, both quickly controlled. I gave her a brief résumé of the night we had spent, and told her that if she would time her homeward trip right when the disturbance was over, she and her father would make it a double

wedding. She gasped, called for Cal, and I sent him to the sending-booth. He came away, grinning.

"She's a little inclined to scold, but you don't need to worry about that, ma'am," he said to Mrs. Early. "I'm sure when she gets here, she'll approve as strongly as I do." He gathered up Mabel, took her for a drive, and thus left us to our first brief visit really alone.

THIS, however, is not the story of my second marriage, happy though that has proved; nor was there much opportunity for courtship. Not only were there a million things to be done in restoring, repairing the damage wrought by earthquake and meteoric pelting, but preparation had to be made for one more trial, and that perhaps the least predictable of all. The Black Star would graze the sun. The terrific tidal action thus caused would produce an enormous increase in solar heat. That much was certain—and little else. Probably we should have terrific rainfalls, as well as sudden melting of the snows which still lay thick in Canada and the extreme northern parts of our own country.

As it happened, the thaw did not wait three weeks. I think even the astronomers, in the rush of other matters claiming attention, hardly allowed for the rise of temperature caused by such a pelting as the earth received; and of course no one at that time knew of the tremendous masses—they must have formed a secondary nucleus—that crashed down on Greenland, melted the ice for miles by the heat of their impact, caused an earth-slip that was felt all over the northern hemisphere, and started to new life volcanic action that had slumbered for a geological period. The weather grew warmer that day; that night there was no frost, and not once during the period of waiting did the temperature drop to that normal for the season.

But our household was too happy to worry overmuch. I was no longer in demand for regular practice, but kept the laboratory closed and held myself ready for emergencies; meantime, bearing a part in administrative work. Cal had formed an alliance with an engineering firm and was busy from morning till night, merely coming home, as he said, to help Mabel act as chaperon; and so with jest and work and anxiety mingled in the usual human proportions, we fared on to the last test.

Every account that I have read of that

March day says that the sun rose like a ball of fire. To my eyes, the sun looked about as it always had; and though its heat was far beyond the average for the season, I had seen enough of the vagaries of spring in the region of the Lakes not to lay undue stress on that fact. At sunrise, the mercury stood sixty-eight degrees. At eleven, it was eighty; and then, I admit, one could see that something was happening. The sun, viewed through smoked glass, no longer looked round; one side of its yellow face had an angry swelling, as though Old Sol had gone back to childhood days and was having a spell of the mumps. Then the gathering haze shut it from sight.

At noon the thermometer marked eighty-four. At one, it marked ninety. A drizzling rain set in which lowered the temperature three degrees. There it stood for hours, while the rain grew heavier, and lightning began to flash, and soon a terrific thunderstorm was raging. Poets have written for ages about "red lightning." I never saw any until the Black Star came; but that night and several times in the next few days the lightning ranged from the usual white or greenish to a vivid violet, and a few times, it was really red.

SHORTLY after Cal and I started to drive to the hospital, a terrific down-pour began. Never have I seen such rain; never do I want to see it again. We seemed to be driving at the bottom of a cataract; and when we reached the hospital, I knew that in spite of raincoats we should be soaked before we could get up the steps. We were.

"It aint raining, Doctor," said Cal as we gained the porch. "The windows of heaven—I reckon some one's left 'em open again. There aint enough air mixed with the water to breathe."

By the Government gauge, carefully tended all through that time, thirteen inches of water fell in less than two hours; and in somewhat less severe form, the storm lasted twelve hours more. Water filled every basement, ran from curb to curb in every street, covered the whole countryside. There are wide regions where these rains are the most vividly remembered incident of the whole experience. When people of those districts speak of "the flood," they mean the flood that came when the Black Star grazed the sun. It was a week before anyone outside of desert regions got another glimpse of the visitor that had

caused such havoc, and then only an astronomer could recognize it. Torn in two by the sun's enormous pull, set aflame by friction and by the terrific radiation which it had received, it was no longer a Black Star, but a blazing world, blazing off into the void from which it came.

ALL this, however, lay in the future as Cal and I changed into dry clothes. We met in the hall; I went to my former patients, while he proceeded to the children's ward to visit a young protégé. In a few minutes a call came for me to go to that ward myself—something had happened to Mr. Baggery. I went at a rush. He was just pushing himself onto a stretcher; but he looked up at me, grinning in spite of pain, and held up the most commonplace, hackneyed, banal agency of accident known to our bored old world—a fragment of banana peel.

"Here it is, Doctor," he said. "Kismet, fate, destiny! Prepared from before the foundation of the world. It doesn't hurt to be shot at, or shook up in an earthquake, or buried alive, or drowned out; but a banana peel—ouch!"

It was a most undramatic ending; but how more surely could one come back to the somewhat prosaic affairs of everyday life? I sent for Helen, so his broken ankle did not long delay his wedding—or mine.

I can add little to this chronicle which the reader does not know already. Crater Lake, made by that huge meteorite which Truesdale located within half a mile merely by timing the sound of its fall, is probably the most popular resort near the city. That meteorite was of crystalline rock; the

one which struck near the observatory was iron; and there were even a few of copper. The largest of these knocked a West Side flat to atoms, killing the owner with flying bricks; but the widow sold the metal for twice the worth of the property, married again within three months, and doubtless wished a hundred times that she could get rid of her second husband at as good a profit. He left her, finally, and she is still known as "the Copper Widow." Of course, even her bonanza was nothing to the enormous mass that crashed down in

Greenland; that made the fortune of Denmark, and is now the world's chief source of copper.

There was much talk for a time that some fragment of the comet had become a second moon, and was revolving round the earth in a path that passed close to the poles. Truesdale scoffed at that notion from the first, and I think no one holds it now. Our old, familiar moon is still doing business at the ancient stand, a trifle farther away, just as our year is a few minutes longer than before. But the comet which pelted the earth did not spare the

moon, and our satellite now has a brand new assortment of craters.

As for climate, it seems agreed now that centuries must pass before the world goes back—if ever—to the severe winters that once were the rule. For myself, I welcome the change; but when my new boy hears or reads of old-time coasting parties and sleigh-rides and skating races, he feels cheated, and wants to know how long it will be before he can spend a winter with his mother's relatives on the shores of Hudson's Bay, and have some real fun.

THE END.

Next Month!

"The Perfect Stranger"

A stirring novelette of an unusual and most attractive sort,

By CALVIN JOHNSON

"The Herriott Gas"

One of the most interesting of all the "Free Lances in Diplomacy,"

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

"The Singing Ghost"

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"The Sunggei Tin Mine," by Warren Hastings Miller, a new story of the Easy Street Experts and at least ten other fine contributions by noted writers, along with—

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What Will You be Earning One Year from Today?

A practical plan that is doubling men's salaries

You have said good-bye to Yesterday, with its failures and disappointments. A new Tomorrow lies ahead of you. What are you going to *do* with it?

To the man who gives little thought to his business progress, one day is much like another—filled with routine work—rewarded by routine pay. He has *no right* to expect great things of the future.

But—how different the outlook of the man who is *training* for promotion, and what a difference a mere twelve months can make in his earning power!

Give a thought, for instance, to the experience of Arthur W. Weber, now Assistant Secretary of the Ohio Savings Bank and Trust Company, one of the largest and most influential banks in the state. One of his earlier letters reads as follows:

"Since I have been training, my salary has been increased 150 per cent. This increase is an annual return of 1,107 per cent upon my investment. Not so bad when you consider that most conservative investments net only 6 or 8 per cent. Not only has the course enabled me to increase my earnings, but it has incidentally aided me in jumping from the job of timekeeper in an automobile factory to my present position as assistant auditor of the largest and best bank in Toledo in less than eighteen months."

More recently he writes as follows: "Monthly dividends are being paid me on my investment in LaSalle training in the form of increased salary *at a rate in excess of 125% per month.*"

Skeptics may suggest that the record of Mr. Weber, just cited, is exceptional. And—if Mr. Weber had won his advancement *without* the aid of home-study training, we should be bound to *agree* with the skeptics. For men are rarely promoted to positions they are not qualified to *fill*. When men have *fitted* themselves for advancement, however, such promotions are not exceptional at all.

That his experience could be paralleled many, many times is evidenced by the fact that during only six months' time as many as 1,248 LaSalle members reported definite salary-increases, as a result of training under the LaSalle Problem Method, totalling \$1,399,507. The average increase per man was 89 per cent.

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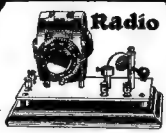
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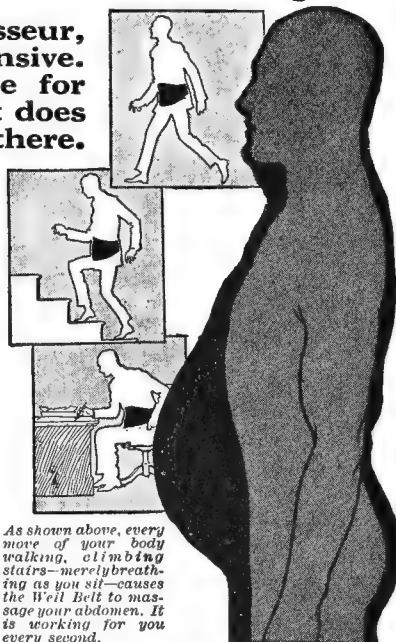
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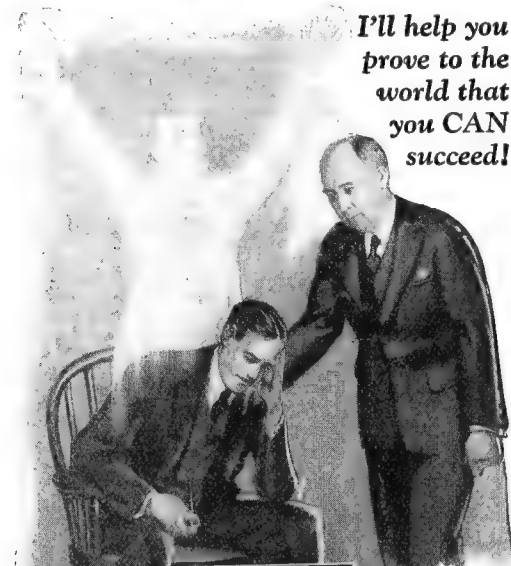
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Railway Postal Clerk

\$1,900 to \$2,700 a year

Post Office Clerk

\$1,700 to \$2,100 a year

Special Clerks at \$2,200 to \$2,300

R. F. D. Mail Carrier

\$1,800 plus \$12.24 per mile a year.

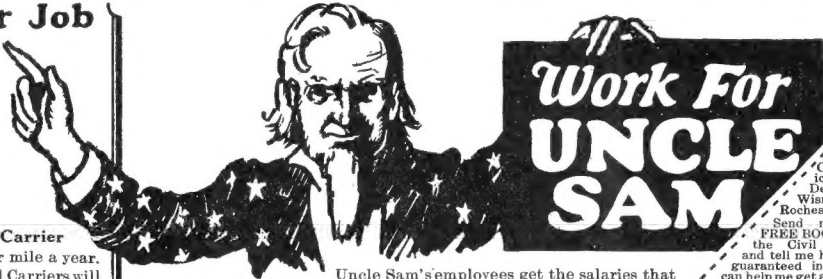
It is estimated Rural Carriers will get from \$2,090 to \$2,300 a year.

Custom House Positions

\$1,440, \$1,680 to \$3,000 and up a year

Internal Revenue Positions

\$1,440, \$1,680 to \$3,000 and up a year



Work For UNCLE SAM

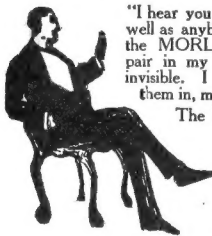
Uncle Sam's employees get the salaries that he promises them. There is no "bunk" about it. A job with him is safer and better than a doubtful position with a private corporation. He won't discharge you for personal reasons or strikes. You will be drawing good, steady, increasing pay while others are looking for work.

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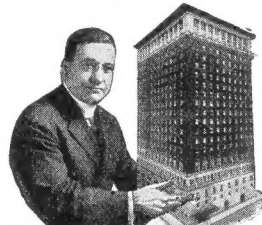
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Your skin can be quickly cleared of Pimples, Blackheads, Acne or any Eruptions on the face or body, Barbers Itch and Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin. CLEAR-TONE has been Tried, Tested and Proven its merits in over 100,000 test cases.

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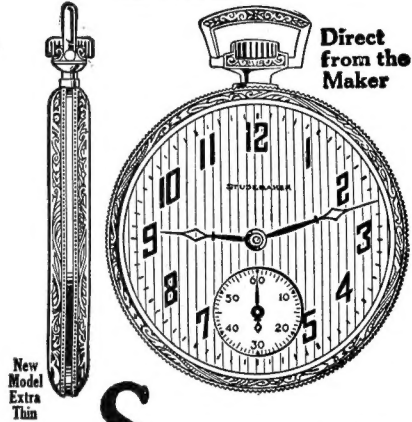
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"Yes, dear—I now work for 'Uncle Sam.' Today I received my appointment.
"Tomorrow, I go out on my first Railway Mail run to Washington, D. C. From now on I will travel on a government pass and see my country. While away from home I get hotel expenses.
"I commence at \$1900 a year and expect a raise to \$2700—\$225 a month—within a short time.
"I have a nice Summer vacation with full pay and very pleasant work. Franklin Institute did it for me."

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THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE

The Consolidated Magazines Corporation, Publisher, 36 South State Street, Chicago

How a Strange Accident Saved Me From Baldness-

Sixty days ago it made me boiling mad. Today I look back and laugh at the incident for it brought me a marvelous new growth of hair.

WHEN my wife began to look sorrowfully at my thinning hair I smiled regretfully. When my friends began to call me "baldy" I felt annoyed. But when my secretary began to look at my glistening scalp and snicker—well it made me mad!

But the worst was yet to come. About sixty days ago I saw a tooth paste advertisement that offered to send a free booklet. I clipped the coupon and gave it to my secretary to fill in and mail.

Well, a few days later, to my utter surprise I found on my desk—not a booklet on toothpaste—but a booklet telling how to grow hair in 30 days!

I glanced from the booklet to my secretary. I felt my blood boiling.

"Miss Harris," I said to her, "I can't say that I appreciate your sense of humor. Just what is your idea?"

She paled. "Why, Mr. Burns—what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" I shouted, "what's the idea of sending me this hint about my hair?"

Tears came into her eyes. And between sobs she explained why it wasn't her fault.

She said that the coupon I asked her to mail had another coupon printed on the back—and the other coupon offered to send a free book about baldness. Well, she simply used her own judgment!

"Hm," was all I could say.

That night on my way home I read the book about baldness. It described an entirely new method of making hair grow—perfected by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It is the only treatment I ever heard of that reached right down to the hair roots and awakened them.

As I read on I felt myself weakening in my resolve not to try another hair treatment. And then when I read that Merke actually guaranteed a new growth of hair in 30 days or no cost—well, I sent for the treatment.

The first two or three days, nothing happened. But a week or so later when I looked in the mirror I saw something that almost bowled me over! For there, just breaking through, was a fine downy fuzz all over my head.

Every day this young hair kept getting stronger. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot. And at the end of sixty days—well, my worries were ended. For I had regained an entirely new growth of hair.

Read This!

"My hair was coming out at an alarming rate, but after four or five treatments I noticed this was checked. My hair is coming in thicker and looks and feels full of life and vigor."—W. C. Great Neck, N. Y.

"I have used your system for eight weeks and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for six years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact, the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair."—W. B. Kenmore, Ohio.

(Original of above letters on file at the Institute.)



Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most baldness the hair roots are not dead, but merely dormant. Now to make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. Yet that is what I had been doing, when I used to douse my head with ordinary tonics, salves, etc. To make a tree grow you must nourish the roots. That's exactly what the Merke treatment does.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as \$500 for results secured. Now these same results may be secured in any home where there is electricity—for a few cents a day.

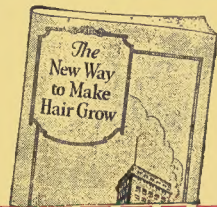
Merke admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases of baldness that nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that Merke invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails to grow hair then the trial is free. Your money is instantly refunded. You are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that people are securing with the Merke Treatment.

"The New Way to Make Hair Grow," is a 34-page book which will be sent you entirely free if you mail the coupon below. This book tells all about the new treatment, shows what it has done for others, and contains much valuable information on the care of the hair. Remember, this book is yours free. And if you decide to take the treatment, you don't risk a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 761, 512 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

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